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THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC AND OTHER POEMS

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

AND OTHER POEMS

William Rose Benét

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The author wishes to extend his thanks to the following for allowing him to reprint here such of these poems as have already appeared in their pages: *Reedy's Mirror*, *The Century Magazine*, and *The Sundial* (*New York Evening Sun*).

TO

LAURA AND STEPHEN

To win to our old cottage through my mind,
First there's a clearing, then a forest-patch
All dark low boughs that writhe and claw to snatch
My cloak away; and then it is I find
The gliding path that threads the thickets blind
Till, veiled in drizzle, juts a dripping thatch;
A mossed green door shines through its silver latch.
This I lift swiftly, knowing you behind.

Yes, there you are,—one all a silken shimmer
Of rainbow fancies in her elfin gown,—
One arm-chair sprawled, mumbling of sword and jewel,
With glasses gleaming! The rich old room's a glimmer
With dancing firelight, crimson on the brown.
It's black night out. *Hello! I've brought some fuel . . !*

You leap up laughing, both of you. Well now,
Look out! I'm drenched! . . These are but faggots here,
Soggy at that—yet they may serve to cheer,
Once dried. *I've come to see you, anyhow.*
Where have I been? Oh, lashed behind the plough
In the world's pasture. So I reappear
To you, old boy,—to you, my very dear!
I missed your hearty grin, *your* musing brow.

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TO LAURA AND STEPHEN

Let's draw up chairs, serve supper, talk between
Of fairies and chimæras, ogres, elves,
Life's whirligig, the tourneys you yourselves
Have splintered lance in. . .
Ah, the enchanted scene,
The healing of the old speech and laughter, blending
To tunes, to dreams, to love of you unending!

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THE SINGING SKYSCRAPERS

This was after midnight.
Thus it befell.
The city that is Heaven,
The city that is Hell,
Blinded by its dazzle
Woke me aware
Of its tall titanic towers
Singing in the air.

From Madison Square
Hidden in the mist
Save for its pharos
A blaze of amethyst
Swimming in the mist,
The Metropolitan,
Singularly ringing
Through steel and stone,
Softly began
In monotone
The singing:

"To Enoch in the Land of Nod I cry,
Aeons away,
Forgotten by our day,
But rebuilded in the night,
Every stone,

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Spectrally on high
Where cloud drives by
And the moon illumes the grey
Ghosts of cities in the sky
Thickly sown;
Majestic phantom cities that move above our slumber
Hung aloft in air—
Cities beyond number,
Towers beyond number!"

And over the Avenue
And Broadway, lying still,
The Flatiron Building answered
With every floor athrill:

"Thebes, I invoke thee,—
Tadmor in the Wilderness
Conceived of Solomon,—
Memphis, Alexandria,
Cyprian Paphos
Sacred to Astarte,—
Overthrown, tragical,
Blank blue ruins magical
Under the moon!
With sistrum and cymbal
Cozen me a tune
From this night air nimble!"

And from far to the South
I heard the Woolworth Tower
Reply from the sky:

"Aye, cities of power,
Each a granite flower
Stamened to unfold
With towers of ivory,
Towers of gold,
Towers of brass
And towers of iron,
Towers all as many as the hours that environ
The years of our servitude,
Our steel and iron yoke.
In the deep blue skies
They stand like smoke!
Pavia the hundred-towered,
Shining over Italy,
The Greek Heliopolis,
The City of the Sun,—
Phœnician Sidon,
Persian Persepolis,
The Vale of Siddim's cities
By sins undone!
There the strong rampires
Of Troy flare fires.
There like spears stand spires.
Priceless citadels
Pulsate with their pæan
Aeon after aeon:
'We are the eternal,
Your frames but shells!
We are your sires,
The frozen fierce desires

Of Man made immortal
By temple-miracles!' "

And the Singer Building,
As I seemed to know,
Resounded through the town
From its station far below.
It sang of the City of the Violet Crown.
It sang Rome risen and Rome gone down.
It sang like a seraph
Tremendous in the dark;
And the million-windowed Plaza
Up by Central Park
Echoed from afar,
Intoning to a star.

Nineveh they sang,
New York they sang!
In surcoats of stone
Like huge knights at vigil,
Each alone
Sealed with the sigil
Of the glories of the Throne
That wakes this Memnonian
Music eternal
In the clay and the compost,
The steel, the stone.

So above our shining towers
To my eyes was given

A last great vision
Of a wall great and high;
Twelve gates, twelve angels,
And, descending out of heaven,
The Celestial City
Blinding in the sky!
It lay foursquare
To what winds might pass.
Jasper was the wall,
And like clear glass
Pure gold was that city
Blazing in the air;
And sapphire, chalcedony,
Emerald, sardonyx,
Chrysolite, topaz,
Jacinth and amethyst
Garnished its foundations;
And the wild salvations
Of the risen nations
Made a glory there!

Night flowed away from it.
The River and the Throne
Blinded my eyes.
My heart fell prone.
But my brain was ringing, ringing
With vast anthems from afar,
And the Towers, the Towers were singing
To the Bright and Morning Star!

THE QUICK-LUNCH COUNTER

I seize a little cardboard slip
On entering, and sight a chair
To hold—if I can steer it there—
On one flat arm, some humorous food.
A good day this for going nude!
The seething street—the stifling glare!
Thick-beaded brow and cheek and lip
Attest it well. I cross the floor,
Slouchingly stand to mix once more
With lunch-time's hasty fellowship,
And scan the sign-board bill-of-fare.

Clerks crunch a roll or two.
Pimpled salesmen spread
Raw mustard on their bread.
Small tradesmen, with a bowl or two
Of milk and crackers floating,
Scan scare-heads black and gloating.
And guttural foreign voices
Dispute 'mid other noises
A dozen fruitless themes. . .
Meanwhile his bow Apollo poises,
Loosing swift-gleaming dreams:

Pellucid peacock-colored ripples
The plangent sunlight strikes along

THE QUICK-LUNCH COUNTER

To shallows where leaf-shadow stipples
The idling, sidling silver ripples
With dust of gold, as down the Tigris
The caliph's boatmen send a song.
I sip cool sherbets winy-clear
And melting on the tongue like snow
In gardens of the grand vizier
Where your lute tinkled, long ago!

"Well, gents, what's yours?" . .
Swab, swab the marble,—dip the soup,
Sling out the sandwich,—punch!—it's done.
Some delicate dessert allures? . .
"Pie? . . Cake? . . Some crullers, son?" . .
"*One Com-bo!*" (shouted) . . To a group
Of seeming gun-men, "Salad? Hey?"
Then, bawled, "Two French fries on the way! . .
Naw! Make that *one!*"
Clash, clang. . . "One scrambled . . *make it two!*"
"Here y'are, sir! . . Ye-es, that's Irish stew!"
Clink, clash, swab. . .
Then a sharp command,
And, starting up, I take in hand
My share of thick white china, holding
Limp bread some limper ham enfolding,
Brown doughnuts, and a liquid less so.
(They call it "coffee." Well, I guess so!)

Pellucid peacock-colored lights
Your eyes have borrowed from the stream.

The jasmine of Arabian nights
Steals round you from the dusk hareem.
Sharper than Haroun's Samsamah,
Sword of the caliph, Love can pierce;
No leopard's black and gold more fierce,
No steed of all Arabia
More swift!—and, as the ezzan floats
Summoning the faithful through the throats
Of your strange criers from the skies,
So have the glances of your eyes
Summoned my soul, Zobiede! . .
There is no more to sing or say!

What all the wealth of camel-trains
Tinkling across the tawny plains,
The spoils of every Eastern vine
Or dainties snared from either blue,
The sky or sea,—whenas your lute
Falls again faint-toned,—and I pray,—
'Mid pyramids of golden fruit,
Pomegranates scarlet gleaming through,
With scented wine like bitter brine
On my parched lips unhealed of yours,—
Can only pray my strength endures
To slay my love, Zobiede!

. . By Heaven, that headline looks like war! . .
To send him to the chair at dawn. . .
Shoots two . . strange suicide . . Before
Fate's fingers reach for me, her pawn,

And I pass through the same dark door
Whither all breathing men are drawn;—
Well, let me sip my lethe'd dream,
Hoping things are not what they seem!

Ices of cool translucent green,
Syrops of amber, pungent spice,
Rosy-fleshed melons filled with ice,
Bowls of rich Shiraz, bowls between
Of Kismische,—and yet the least
Dog of a Giaour doth rarer feast,
Since 'twixt us twain with each new day,
Shines Honor's sword, and points the way!

The sefy takes the antelope—
But not the hooded bird or blind!
Fetters of fealty bind my hope.
The Caliph murders, to be kind!
So sigheth Giafar, the good vizier,
A princedom may not satisfy
Since Haroun's daughter, bending near,
Eclipsed all glories from his sky
He takes the long road that he must.
He serves one only, dubbed "The Just."
Alas, he can no other way
Than crush his brittle heart of clay
In his hot breast! Zobiede,
There is no more to sing or say!

Brush off the crumbs . . and now what comes?
A glass of water? Clean? Well, I suppose so.
Who knows so?
Cool, anyway! . . "Hey there, your check!"
A jar of toothpicks pushed my way,
A pink and puffy female hand
Scraping the nickels I produce
Across her counter (while her neck
Glistens with—"perspiration" say).
Behind me the screen-door flacks loose.

The high gods hover when they choose.
I made an excellent lunch today!

FILMS

"*Ding-dang-dang!*" the electric piano, the electric piano
jangled through the dimness.
Down hissed a ray from the wizard's eye, imprisoned in
his little black box on high,
And a magic circle on the taut white sheet wavered to
focus all the gayness, grimness,
And mystery of life's long winding street, for its slaves
'twixt death and birth on earth. . .
"*Ding-dang-dang!*" rang the tinny piano, rippling with
the echoes of a world's wild mirth.

Let us stumble down in the odorous dark
And squeeze into seats along the aisle.
Your mind is "enlightened." With scorn you mark
The frown and smile of the rank and file.
Their musty moralities leave you cold.
These obvious "heart-throbs" are *so* old!
What is there here that is worth one's while? . .
"Is it their humor, is it their tears,
Their maudlin mess of hopes and fears,
Blind to all proud insurgent art
And the subtle nobilities of the heart?" . .
Yes! Here is the pith of all budded theme,
Man's glamorous fundamental dream!
Sit through a couple of films and feel
Your lugubrious soul in every reel!

"*Ding-dang-dang!*" the electric piano, the electric piano
tinkle-tankles faster
A popular tune banal and bright . . and from over our
heads a stream of light
Wakes a magic trade-mark swift and clear, to usher in
a story of delight or disaster
By a crowing rooster, or a spinning sphere. . . Then a
picture flickers on our eyes' surprise,
"*Strum-a-strum-strum!*" The piano ceases. And we
rush into a region where the fool turns wise!

First Film: Down Along the Mountain

Waving his blue serape, the wild vaquero wind
Whooped o'er the purple mountain, the herds of Spring
behind.
His silver-mounted saddle, his chinking bridle-chains,
Glittered between the live-oaks as he flashed to find the
plains.

Down along the mountain
A cowboy
Came riding,
Down along the mountain,
Down along the mountain,
O'er the deep-cut canyons,
Through the high hill-meadows;
But his heart was swept of shadows
And it gushed a golden fountain,
As his hard-braced little horse's legs

Went jolting,
Went sliding—
With hitches, twists and slithers,
Humped-up rump and sunken withers—
While the pebbles spun along;
And the loosed water-courses
In his soul foamed to his riding,
Red-roaring, fervid forces
Thundered "Spring!" through every vein;
And the clouds above the mountain in the blue of love
abiding
Caught the glory of his song
With its braggart refrain:

"Hang
your
spurs
On the back-door of the rainbow!
Bow
to
Gawd
In the great big sky corral!
Hitch your britches, and amble to the ranch-house!
Sail in, Davy—sail in, Davy—
Sail in, Davy!
You're bound to get that gal!"

Silken and orange poppies, lupin in blinding blue,
Painted the billowed foothills, and pure as a globe of
dew

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

The meadow-lark's lyric bubble purled out of silver oats,
And song from the orange orchards trilled from throbbing vireo throats.

Dreaming in the meadow
Goldilocks lay sleeping.
Shaggy "Shep," beside her,
His nose on his paws,
Watched the distant valley
With its sprawly ranch-roofs peeping,
Lolled his tongue at blackbirds—
Skimming red-winged blackbirds—
Curled his lip at blackbirds
And a crow's far caws.

He saw the blue serape of the wild vaquero wind
Stream o'er the purple mountain, the herds of Spring behind.
Silver-mounted saddle and chinking bridle-chains
Glittered between the live-oaks as he flashed to find the plains.

"Shep" rose trembling,
But dissembling
All his awe—
And raised a paw,
Took a step,
(Romantic "Shep!")
And then, beyond the oaks, he saw,
As from hiding

FILMS

A cowboy
Come riding
Down along the mountain,
Down along the mountain,
Singing strong at a song—
For his heart in the Spring
Gushed a golden fountain,
And he simply had to sing!

"I'm the fellah you was waiting for,
M-y-y-y dear!
I'm the fellah you was waiting for,
And I'm here on my hawse before your door.
So what will you do with a fellah like that?
Take down your shawl, pin on your hat,
M-y-y-y dear—
And come on, come on—we're goin'
On a ride
To the moon!"

Goldilocks, the rancher's daughter,
Had a laugh like a fairy,
Had a smile the angels taught her,
(Though her real true name was Mary.)
And I think they must have brought her
In a pearl and ivory car
When she came to Bar-X-Bar.

* * * * * * * *

Look out, look out for squirrel-holes,
When sunshine makes you drowse!

Spring will daze a cayuse, and a dog's bark make him
jump.
Don't fool along through live-oak groves
Where Spring is keeping house!
You'll slip sidewise and you'll stumble, and go grass-
ward with a bump—
And the surest-footed cayuse prove a triple-plated
chump.
That was how it happened—*thump!*

Goldilocks
Sprang from sleep.
And a cowboy, in a heap,
Scrambled up, and then uncovered,
(When he saw his pony stood
Quivering, snorting, but all sound).
And bowed low to the ground
In a gay Lothario mood.

Spring in their veins
Thrilled and tingled.
Spring in their brains
Throbbed and mingled.
Her cloud of gold hair,
Like an aureole,
Breezes tossed—to snare
His heart and soul.
Breezes swept its strands
To a maze of light
Till he clenched his hands

And stared at the sight,
And his heart sang loud for delight:

"You came out of the sunset to me
Long ago, long ago—
Riding a cayuse the color of night
And whirling a lariat of diamond light!
The hoods of your stirrups were gold
And the horn of your saddle was pearl,
Little girl!
And you told
What you know
Of the range that lies way past the planets,
Just starlight to mortals below!

"Come up on my pony with me
And we'll ride
For that range,
Raising a dust on the white milky way,
Bucking through space like a bronco at play!
We'll weave up to heaven with a whoop and set the
gold streets in a whirl,
Little girl!
I will loop,
For a change,
All the stars with the slack of my rope,
And bust every wild steer on that range!"

"Shep" growled once, then wagged beside him.
Mary stood aloof and eyed him,

In her figured calico
Looking like a princess lost.
And the ranch-house far below
Spired a thin blue smoke toward cloudland . .
Then the cowboy laughed, and tossed
His Stetson high in air,
And he said, "Miss, I swear,
As you stand there,
You just strike me like a cyclone, till I want to buck
and r'ar!"

"How did you," said Mary,
"Come so far?
The cows out here are tame.
Me and Par
Herds our few;
But sheep—
There's a heap.
Down there's the siding, by the marshes.
You can see a cattle-car."

"Where did I come from?"
Said he.
"Round by Arizone—
That's me!
Loped it on my lone—
And Mexico.
I've wrastled from Cheyenne to San Antone—
That's so!"

"Seems we're shif'less here,"
Said she.
"An'—oh dear!
Par is gettin' queer.
Mar is dead. An' as fer me,
I'm—oh well,
This life is Hell—
Baked-bread hills, and sky, and sky . . !
Sometimes I think that I might just as well
Die!"

"What? *You!*"
Said he.
"You that raked your spurs
Into me
First time I laid eyes on
That hair o' yern?"

Down toward the west's hill-filled horizon
The sloping sun began to redly burn.

Mary flushed—could not speak—
But a sparkle on her cheek
Tattled of a tear.
"Miss," he said, "my dear,
I'll be gone from here
Just like that—or, if you say so,
I'll stand pat and wait a year.
If your Pap is queer,

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You won't make no sudden hike—
Not the girl that *you* look like.
There's a feller in the Bible,
A sky-pilot told me of
Oncet, that worked fer fourteen years
Fer his girl. They tried to fool him
In between times—but he stuck.
I would chuck—
Well, ye know it kinder skeers
When I think what I would do
Just to sit acrost from you
At the table, and corral
Hopes and fears—and damn the luck!—
With you fer everlasting pal."

"Hush!" said she.
"Are you—are you—
Oh!" she whispered. "Do you mean you're *fonda* me?"

Waving a red serape, the wild vaquero wind
Fled through the fiery sunset, with phantom herds behind.
Bellowing loud and lowing with Spring's wild loco-weed
The galloping herds of the sunset passed in a mad stampede!

* * * * * * * *

Click-flash! . . and then *PART TWO,*
Fantastical with "derring-do";

FILMS

Moonlight elopement and swift pursuing,
Lickety-split over mountains blue;
The obstacle-race of every wooing
That always follows the ring-dove-cooing,
Precedes the "tender and true,"
And spices the plot to a peppery-hot
And highly romantic brew!

The dust puffs white, and the bullets bite,
And the horses fly along the sky,
Splash through the creek at hide-and-seek,—
And the lovers cling and the shot-guns speak!

Aye, Movie Man! And the poet can
Delegate that to you! . .
I only pretend to know *THE END.*
Possibly this will do!

* * * * * * * *

Down in the valley,
In a ranch-house window,
A yellow lamp,
A little steady star mocks the sky.
And down along the mountain,
Down along the mountain
Stream the sheep bleating
From their pastures high;
Shambles a cayuse,
And a cowboy singing

Lifts in his stirrups
To see that window shine.
Down along the mountain
His voice comes ringing
To where his wife stands clinging
To the morning-glory vine
On the porch of that ranch-house white-glimmering afar,
On the porch of the ranch-house of the Bar-X-Bar.

"You're waiting, Mary—
Oh, I know you're waiting, Mary—
Like I always knew that it would be.
Spring's comin', Mary,
Summer's comin', Mary,
Winter's comin', Mary?
What's that to you an' me!
For Spring's come truly
Forever an' forever—
Spring and the evenin', an' the moon.
Sing the younguns off to sleep,
Fer I am comin', Mary—
I am comin', Mary, with a cowboy tune—
Supper's on the table, an' I'm comin' soon!"

* * * * * * * *

"Ding-dang-dang!" the electric piano, the electric piano romps across the fading
Of the last lettered legend and the last dumb show.
Old eyes soften and young cheeks glow,

For they breathe the air of a mountain height, with a
gorgeous sunset o'er the peaks parading,
In this stuffy cave, with its ghastly light.
The winds of the open sweep the cheap
"Ding-dang-dang!" of the tinny piano to a tiny echo
from a far dust-heap!

Now "Thrum-thram-thram!"—the piano ceases.
From a fresh reel humming, there is magic coming—
All the sheaves of story, all the wizard meadows, all
the fields of romance for the poor to reap!

Second Film: Devil's Blood

D'Artois does not love the King!
See him frown,
Home from war's adventuring,
In his castle o'er the town,—
In the gorgeous gloom
Of his turret room!

Now he smites his hands
Together—and his teeth
Glitter in an awful smile. . . What thought, beneath
Those jetty love-locks, whispers "Death"
Through his harshly-taken breath?
Ah-h! He understands!

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He understands why Clare
Is cold and pale
With strange flushes. . . *Swift he turns.*
There she stands. . . No words avail
To move her doubting gaze. All day
She stares,—she has gone mad, they say,
Since he rode away.

Nay!
He knows the serpent in his Eden—*Love!*
She loves the King.
He sees them walk the garden. The King talks.
Birds are a wing,
Brilliantly sing,
Aye, everything
Is gay with flowers and song. The flowers from their stalks
Salute her beauty. And, above,
The summer sky is shimmering love.
Her summer eyes are brimming love.
She loves the King!

D'Artois does not love the King.
See him pace
The moonlit rampart, with a cloak
To hide his face!
The silver moon rides with white prow, the swift clouds race.
From his wried lips the muffled curses choke.

* * * * * * * *

Through the town's twisted street,
Down the long stair
That is the street, a graybeard hobbles. See!
He is an ancient steeped in alchemy.
He peers now here, now there . .
He grasps his bundle close and hobbles to his lair.

Here are strange fires.
In this dim cave-like room all terrible desires
Lurk in those glimmering alembics, rise
In fume from those retorts,—to mock the skies
And tempt the angels out of Paradise.

Over a glittering brazier's crimson coals
The Alchemist holds thin hands.
His parchment skull white-fringed
Gleams in the ruby-tinged,
Green-misted light. . .
His dark soul understands
The hell of darkened souls.
His daughter was the King's
Captive, long since,—and died. He dreams of dreadful
things.
Who knocks so late tonight?

In the black door
Stands d'Artois, dripping with the rain.
Once more
The Alchemist's eyes lift from their dream of pain.
The picture that he sees

Dislimns. . . He bows.
"I seek for my disease
A cure—a stealthy cure and swift! You know
Swift powders, cunning poisons? Even so!
Not for myself—ah, no!
For one—
But even here I fear I were undone
To breathe the name!"

The old man's eyes strike flame,
The picture shimmers of his daughter's shame.

Their faces draw together tense and white
In the green ghastly light.
Slow tigrish smiles play on their whispering lips.
Crime's black eclipse
Weds them in darkness. With thin, clawlike hands
The Alchemist gestures. Yes, he understands!

He holds a little vial
Of squirming flame. "Here, good Milord,—one trial—
Enough!" *He spurns back d'Artois' gold.* "That flask
Put to its brooded use—is all I ask!"

* * * * * * * *

Under the great gold canopy,
Stiff rustling, of his high and regal bed,
In his great palace high above the town
The King sleeps peacefully.
D'Artois' swift, catlike tread

Presages naught to him.
The cresset light is dim.
D'Artois paces the antechamber floor,
Listens without the arrassed door,
Seeming unlistening,—jests his mates at cards.
Would they have wine? Seek it! "See! D'Artois guards
This door till your return!"
They go. He stands
With almost the achievement in his hands.

He listens. He goes in.
Stealthy as sin
He creeps toward the curtained bed. One hand
Fingers his poniard, lest the deed long-planned
Somehow go wrong. The little vial shakes
In his left hand. And there are foamy flakes
Upon his lips. . . He leans. The time appears
To pour the poison deftly in the ears.
But the King hears!

The curtains move. The King's smile freezes. Eyes
Meet eyes, with ghastliness and swift surmise.
Then suddenly strong fingers snap the vial
From d'Artois' hand. A voice to rouse espial
Is all but raised.
The desperate thrust is made
Thrice with the poniard.
Terribly afraid,
D'Artois glides backward to the arrased door.

The King falls forward. Blood taps on the floor.
A pool forms, darkling, spreading more and more.

D'Artois slips through the door. His mates are back.
"Does the King sleep?" . . "Aye, just the old attack
Of coughing—but—I soothed him. It—is late.
I must inspect the guardroom at the gate!"

The cards are tossed by candlelight. And then,
"Look! How that shadow grows beneath the door!"
"Some cresset's spilt." . . "What's this? . . Christ!
Blood!—and more!"
"Torches!" "Tear back that arras!" "Call your men!"

A dark thin stream worms through the anteroom
And slides 'neath curtains out into the gloom
Of the great stair of state. The white stair gleams
Like polished silver in the pale moonbeams
Through the great stained-glass window diamond-paned.
And then that thin black trickle has attained
The stair-head, and flows down the marble flight,
Sinuous, swift, and on to left and right,
And underneath the palace doors, and out into the night.

* * * * * * * *

D'Artois, in the King's deep garden o'er the Town,
Plunges through shrubbery, and flings him down
On a marble bench in moonlight. Horrid fear
Raves like a fury at his deafened ear.

Only it seems—as if—his heart could hear
A strange thin dripping sound, and a thin sound
Of sluggard tricklings threading the dark ground.
He starts up in the moonlight. Down the path—
Is it but shadow?—steals a thread of wrath,
A red bright thread. It reaches him. He reels.
Wet! Warm! Wily athwart his steps it steals
And stains his white court footgear, toes to heels.
He tears the vile shoes from him. Far he throws
Them to the bushes,—runs in silken hose,
Falls in the laurels—up and on—who knows
Where? In a flash he scales an unguarded wall
Of the great garden, heavily to fall
On the other side, above the sleeping town.
He seeks and finds a roadway. And falls down
Again in moonlight.

Thin and darkly red,
Down the white road trickles a tortuous thread,
Winding between small pebbles, curling round
Obstructions, sliding, slipping o'er the ground.
It meets,—and, twining, glides o'er d'Artois' hand,—
Creeps up his arm, staining lace cuff and band
And satin sleeve and shoulder and prone cheek.

He twitches, shudders,—rises with a shriek!

He tears the fabric from his shoulders, tears
The doublet off, pitches the coat he wears
Far through a hedge, rubs his encrimsoned hand

With poulticed leaves—staggers—can hardly stand,
And lurches down the road.

And quietly
The small red stream that scarcely eye can see
Follows him down the path, still trickling sinuously.

Later. Still moonlight. Down the stairs and down
Of the steep street that leads into the town
Leaps d'Artois crouching, seeking every shade
That offers, shuddering lest some ambuscade
Of prying eyes descry him; then once more
Enters his own dark garden by a secret door. . .
But trickling, trickling down the street's steep stairs
The small thin stream of vengeance onward fares. . .

And townsfolk early climbing
Unto the distant chiming
Of the hill-chapel's call to morning prayers
See it, and point, and crowd with owlish glares,
Marking its wet thread like a crimson clue
Leading to d'Artois' garden, and therethrough,
Amid the flowers, his awed retainers see
The red thread fatefully
Traverse white paths until it halts and is no more
In a bright stain upon the steps of d'Artois' turret-door.

* * * * * * * *

Greyly in his grey tower he sits and shakes
As if the floor beneath him writhed with snakes.

His eyes rise to the mirror. She is there,
Wavering in the door. He whispers, "Clare!",—
Whirls up with hands thrust backward as he leans
Against the table. "You?" . . "Dear Love!" . . "This
means . . ?"
"That now I know you love me! Brokenly
I say you sooth; he snared and sorceried me.
His power was from the fiend—and devil's blood
Marks down his slayer!"
"Mayhap mine own serpent mood
Has marked me down. And yet I learned what tryst
He made with her whom my dark alchemist
Called daughter. Had I sought but cleaner hate . . !"

"No! A dog rots. But love returns too late
Save for sweet parting! *Ah, I love you well!*"

"Wrapped in such flame then, what are flames of Hell?
Why, look! They shrivel and shrink, Love, Love!
And we
Blaze through this hour into Eternity!"

* * * * * * * *

And now the piano
Changes to gay
Romping, rollicking tune.
For *aqua tofano*
And poniard-play
And blood beneath the moon,
And alchemists and the villain's curse,

Are faint as the gasping sigh that stirs
Through the gloom of this room that has looked on
doom.
Hail to the rare buffoon!

"*Tinklety-tink!*" the gay notes race.
"Here is a queer familiar place
That makes a miracle of your face,
A magic all have seen.
Sizz—but wouldn't you like to stop—
Clickety-click—at *this* barber-shop,
This rare Bohemian Barber-shop?
Sizz—well, watch the screen!

Third Film: The Bohemian Barber-shop

Dapper and deft, six little barbers
Snick-snick together in a neat white row.
Glittering with glass the bright shop harbors
Six sprawled customers, languishing below
The hands that grip and the clippers that clip,
And the towels that slap and the razor's scrape,—
All the tools that shape, from nose to nape,
A man from a bruin, make a mummy glow,
And fashion the features, and the hands, and the heels,
Into shining beacons. So the film unreels.

Noontide sunlight fills the shop.
At the door,

Red and white, the stripèd pole
(Heraldry that shows some soul!)
Casts a shadow on the floor.
Here one barber seeks his strop.
At that table, hark the snore
Of the fat man, where the comic papers flutter by the score!

"Flick!" and "Flack!", the crouched boot-black
Slaps his cloth, and plies his brush.
"Snick-snick-snick!" the scissors click.
Then there falls a sudden hush.
See, the barbers all are staring
And the customers are craning.
Who is this who enters, wearing
Topper, tailcoat, and a paining
Wealth of beard and hair? Disdaining
All the bows each barber tenders,
Lo, he slips his coat, and stands,
With peculiar long white hands,
In a shirt of fearful pattern crossed by marvelous suspenders!

His trousers-wrinkles
Are frightful taste.
His dark hair sprinkles
Down to his waist.
His black beard reaches
Near to his knee.

One barber beseeches
Him volubly—
With his customer finished—
To have diminished
That tangled cataract capillary.
The stranger nods, but his eyes are wary.
He seats himself,—and, once in the chair, he
Seems to drowse.
And from his brows
The barber lifts a curling lock.
Snip! . .
It is like an electric shock!
Look at the mirror! Look at the clock!
The plate-glass mirror suddenly ripples
Concave, convex.
The moon-faced clock is whizzing
Its hands around and round.
Like galvanized cripples
The customers perplex
The barbers with their antics.
They writhe and slump and bound.
The shaving mugs are fizzing,
For the stranger's supple hands,
Emerging from the sheet
That covers him completely,
Are making passes fleetly,
Hypnotic, weird commands
That mock the silly sunlight
From the prosaic street!

The mirror-flanking bottles, blue and red,
Shoot up strange spills and quills that elongate
And suddenly diminish, having fluffed to feathery head.
And madly, at the rate
Of dreams, the barbers all lay on
With flashing razors, shimmering scissors,
While all the chairs rotate
Like demon whizzers.
All daylight actuality is gone!

See! The electrical massage machine
Is burr-rring like a fiend let loose.
The water pours
From basins on to floors,
A shining sluice.
And—what the deuce!—
The white soiled-towel holders
Disgorge long tumbling strips
Of flowering towels, purple, pink, and green,
That trip the feet;
And from unfortunate shoulders
Every tucked sheet
Is whisked,—and foam and lather froths and drips
Whitely across the scene.

And as for hair,—
Hair? It is everywhere!
Black hair, brown hair, blonde hair and red
Sprouts and curls and lengthens
From every head.

Even the bald pate turns beneath the eye
To a capillary jungle on the sly.
Over the floor,
Full knee-deep now,—
Out of the door
Like a wild hay-mow,
The hirsute horror engulfs the little shop.
Stop, you devil-stranger! Good Lord, stop!
Hippety-hop
Dance the frantic crew
Of barbers turned to jumping-jacks. The manicurist too
Is shrieking. What avails "half-moons" politely scissored,
When this fearful length of nails (begotten of that wizard!)
Is pouring from the fingers of her "catch," like squirming flails! . .
And the yellow Dandruff Cure
And the fat Hirsutus bottle
Their ruby streams and green
Are playing on the mess!
Black magic, that is sure!
Oh swiftly, someone, throttle
The author of a scene of such distress!

And then the stranger rises
In his weird suspenders,
Still weaving of his fingers,
And the shop surrenders

To his further moods and tenses.
Hypnotically waving
His digits, he commences
A master-task of shaving.
For, drawing from his pocket
A blade as sharp as scandal,
He fits it to the socket
Of an enormous handle;
And seizes one and other,
And holds them in a vise. . .
As bald as a billiard-ball they leave him in a trice!

Staggering and stumbling
Through that rolling hairy sea,
With acrobatic tumbling
One by one they flee,
Staring eyes and beaded brow,—
Till—the shop is empty now,
But—*all's in place again!*

And the eye discovers then
A swift and stealthy cat,
That was not there before,
Slinking through the door
In a black top-hat! . .
And the sunlight shimmers. And a passing "cop"
Gawks through the door of the deserted barber-shop. . .

And the film tails out to punctures, and the loud laughs stop.

SMOKE

Pouring up from that office-building's chimney against
the blue,
Clots and gouts of dense white smoke are sailing.
Up and out into sun that lights them and wind that
shreds them away,
Blinding white, dove-gray,
Acrobatic masses of smoke are swirling and tumbling
and trailing
And dancing over the roofs to the sky of a vivid autumn
day.

Black smoke is a terror and wonder,
And smoke that is purple like thunder,
And smoke over foundries at night
Wears a weird volcanic light.
The smoke of a city fire glows
Like the palpitant heart of a rose.
Opal is smoke at evening, when roofs are the snow's.
But from these smoke forms might be sculptured great
symbols of joy and peace.
They bulge forth to the sun like clouds, as white as the
speckless fleece
Of that one dazzling cloud in the delicate blue of the
dome,
Shaped like a fairy alp fringed with a spectral foam.
Nymphs of the air, ghosts of the gods of Greece,
Surf of the sky they seem in their bright release.

SMOKE

The cornices of the office-building's roof
Are hard and cold; its outlines are hard and cold.
Its windows are like the eyes of selfish and cruel men.
Glory, I cry, full glory then
To these billowing masses of snowy smoke,
These ephemeral but wildly immaculate plumes
High and aloof
Tossing above the ledgers and the looms,
The dusty, drab, disheartened office rooms,
The thousand petty tyrannies and glooms!
Cut me a cloak,
Ye traders in sweated garments, in waists and gabardines,
Though far beyond your means,
Yet cut me a cloak from such cloud,
Ye stout, purse-proud,
Cigar-stupored dullards, and, lo! I will cry you aloud—
Even you—for gods, you who fumble your fabrics, nor dream
That the genius of steam
Shames you in robes so bright
Of sun-blinded immaculate white
Even now from your high roofs billowing, heroic in riot astream.

GREEN TURTLES

There was something live and stirring
Past the smudgy, fly-specked glass,—
Something strange and weird, averring,
To the constant crowds that pass,
More than what its glassy mate
Shimmered on the eye.
So I slowed my hurried gait
As my feet went by.

First I searched the further window,
Happy as a child.
Red tomatoes, silver fish, yellow lemons piled
On a chopped ice bed;
Brilliant color splashed about!
A sign in the window simply said,
"Brook Trout."

Then, "Corn on the Cob" I read;
Saw the oyster-shells
Gleam in scalloped rows—then, something else
That set the doors hospitably creaking on their jambs
And moved my mouth to watering:
"Baked Soft Clams."
But that was on a swing-board the other side the rise
Of the low stone steps . . so I lifted up my eyes,

And, in the Weird Window, I saw a parrot beak
Nosing up the glass with its nostril-holes aseek.
And I stood and I stared, with an A. D. T.
And a leathern-aproned fellow. There we stood, we three,
Gazing at the Turtles, with our dumbly-wondered "whys,"
While in deep eye-sockets rolled their dark grieved eyes.

There they slopped about in a little muddy wet,
Their hind-flippers shoving out a toe-claw slow,—
Dreaming of the estuaries?—trying to forget
The West Indies, the Pacific, or the Gulf of Mexico?
Each horny-crusted carapace had gleam and glow
Of amber, polished agate, bronze or gold; and all together
They nosed along the show-glass disgusted at the weather,
Their flippers curved like scimetars in sheaths of varnished leather,
Their necks a web of wrinkles,—and their spirits low.

"Green" is what they call them, but they are not green;
They are crackled yellow lacquer, fleshy-black, and orange-shelled,—
At least in shades of orange were the ones that I beheld,
My blundering chelonians, that came, the waiter said,
Only from Long Island. (But each searching, waving head
Spoke of deep-sea beaches and of algæ-meals instead!)

Indeed they seemed a marvel, in that "Sea Food" place;
They mesmerized my mind with their thrusting bulk!
And I saw gigantic tortoises swimming round a hulk
Sunk deep off Galapagos; I saw the carapace
Of the tortoise of the legend bear up the weighty mass
Of this world, and the poet in Apollo come to pass
Through a turtle's ribs and plates, till he shook the sun-
rise gates
With heaven-smiting harmony and song like Hippocras!
And then one turtle "turned turtle" while he sought
An exit through this water that was firm and smooth and
hard,
And no use to struggle at, since one only tumbled flat—
And back through cloudy years blew my startled thought
To days by my memory silver-starred.

* * * * * * * *

There's a creek near the Susquehanna River
Where the sunbeams dance and quiver
And the mud lies caked and browned and baked,
And the grasses sigh to the summer sky,
And you mark, from the ooze upcraning,
A shiny black head, disdaining
The sky's bright blaze with its haughty gaze
Of an eye like a bead; and soon indeed
The sliders slip from the wet creek-lip,
And then you can note on head and throat
The golden stripes, as the splay-foot wipes
On a reed, and the shell emerges well
Of the tiny knight in his hauberk tight
With his wrinkled flesh like a close black mesh

Of light chain mail, and absurd toy tail.
Oh red-bellied terrapin the black boys love,
Up I see you heave with a hunch and a shove,
Shoot your neck in its webbed elastic skin
And crane with the hauteur of a mandarin.
Your scarlet plastron is brave to see
When one tilts you over carefully,
But your black-lacquered coat would have graced, I know,
The cabinet of the Magnifico.
And your hose are embroidered with brilliant thread
In stripes of gleaming gold or red.
What if your snappishness shows you bilious,—
You are sublimely supercilious!

My grandmother's house is white
With bright green shutters bowed.
'Tis a delightful, simple sight
To see it from the road!
And if you want some milk and rusk,
Turn down the lane and tap
At the side screen-door, or seek the dusk
Of the parlors, each an ample lap,
From the little pillared porch, that twines
With morning-glory vines.

Once there was a garden bright
Right before her door,
All box-bordered of a height;
Flower-beds many score,

Tan-bark walks that had the smell
Of Heaven and a miracle,
And an arbor-gate as well!

How good she was to one so small
When "Nat," the colored boy, was all
My marvel!—*fit for Fame's green wreath!*
Why, he could whistle through his teeth
And walk upon his pink-palmed hands,—
And earn my Uncle's reprimands!
And once, when I was rather sick,
He brought me turtles from the "Crick,"
Those same red-bellied sliders, only
Oh so small!—and looking lonely,
I thought. . . I put them in a bowl,
And round they paddled, sick of soul
For their sweet mud—and in the night,
When small-boy eyes were sealed up tight,
They hauled them up and dropped flip-flop
From bowl's rim to the table-top,
From table-top to matted floor,
And lounged superbly out the door,
And slid through grasses, proud and slick,
And swaggered back into the "Crick."

Bubble-throat basker, beaked fly-snapper,
Prim and particular, pert and dapper,—
Cumberland Valley, fail thou never
Of these quaint denizens forever!

* * * * * * * *

My brain floundered back again.
I heard the waiter say,
Flapping his napkin,—"Fine and fresh, today!
Turtle steak—thirty cents! Turtle soup—fifteen!"
I was glad they could not hear.
I felt too mean!

THE SUFFRAGE PROCESSION

We marched in the Women's Parade.
Our round yellow lanterns swayed
Down the village street.
Transparencies bobbed above,
And along the line.
The Autumn night was a thing to love,
Cool and blue and divine,
Ripe like wine.
Our feet scuffed, beating time,
To the drummers behind and before;
And the foolish yellow flag I bore
Was a ruddy banner rippling out to a ringing battle rhyme.

As the replicating drumsticks rattled
To the cymbals clashing,
The stars wheeled in cohorts dense, embattled,
Their bright spears flashing.
"A-rubdub-rubdub-rubadubadub,
The girl I left behind me!"

In the ranks of the women before us
Marching silent to our whistling chorus
Flashed forth the face I love, merry and kind and bright,
The eyes with their sweet and loyal light
Thrilled to starry brilliance, upthrusting a banner o'er us
Of blinding white.

THE SUFFRAGE PROCESSION

I marched with the men behind—
And yet, hand in hand with her,
On a lonely mountain height
I stood, and watched cloud-chasms fill with fire
And the golden phœnix all our dreams desire
Struggle blazing aloft like a great and flaming flower,
With a crimson shower
Of scattering sparks on his darkly smouldering pyre.

Lonely purple peak
Snow-strewn,
Magnificent under the moon,
Would you could speak!
You know so well which one of us holds your lease,
Reaps the superb increase
Of your meadows of flowery vision,
Your pastures Elysian!

Yet am I inheritor
Through her of your galaxies,
Your God-transfixing trees,
Your red sunrise door.
These that returned no more
When I lusted and laughed of yore
Now burst on my mind like arousing and cleansing surf
On a baked and scurfy shore!

Loud o'er the wrangling drum
These things cry "Come!"
In the merry flame of her faith my fears are dumb.

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

Our silly round yellow lanterns sway
On to a sword-white dawn of day
Whatever the weary wise men say!

"A-rubdub-rubadub-arubadubadub,
The girl . . ?"

ON SUNDAY

What are your Sundays to you? To me they are heaven.
I do not hurry through breakfast or rise at seven.
I have time to play with Jim,
Who is one and a half, yellow-haired, quite a jolly viking,
With this earth a lot to his liking,
Fond of adventures in words and an artist in whim;
The Marcelline of the infant world, with the heart of a dauntless hero,
And also a dash of tears
That would soften even Nero.

Then, if my pen is
Slow, and the jobs are done, and she says I may,
And the year's too late for a swim together, I ramble off toward the bay
To play at tennis.

In the autumn it sets the blood leaping
And clears the brain to a cool, crisp-thinking joy
To swing at the ball and to charge to the net and volley,
Even to race "all out" for a lob to the base-line
Or fizzle a manful smash with a smack "on the wood"!

The cold sweat stings on your forehead, the tape of your racket
Sticks to your hand or grinds too gritty with sand

In your palm; but this cannot irk one for more than an
instant,
The play is too hot.

And shuttlecock-battledore leaps the barbarous banter
Of the doubles players. The grunts and the curses and
sighs
Of your partner, of your opponent, of you yourself,
Float up like delectable incense.
And his cross-court return forever shoots at my feet!
Why can I only "get in" when the serve is a fault?

The shower-bath starts with a sprinkle of drops that
drum
On the slatted floor of the bath-house. Then *swish-swish-*
SWISH! it is mantling your shoulders, soaking your
hair,
Thrusting whole sheaves of icicles under your shudder-
ing skin.
"Yow!" you leap. "Yow, *Yow!*" and yank at the
handle.
SWISH!
The confronting bay is all cold-blue glitter,
But these fields and undulant hills and rich-colored
woods
Are wistful with afternoon sunlight, garnet, and bronze.
The smell of the stalks of milkweed and withered grass,
The flaunt of chestnut and beech
And oak, in Assyrian robes, set raiment on God,

And throne Him on high in the ruddying afterglow
That turns such an embered crimson through ash-colored
clouds.

He is there!
Lo! with all principalities, angels, and powers of the air,
He is there!

He careers in a chariot drawn by the blazing-eyed beasts
Of St. John's Apocalypse sheer o'er the rioting sky;
His face is the setting sun,
Radiant, but sad, irradiating life,
And solemn with finer meanings, a nobler mien;
A lion-like face, and mournful, with a wild and golden
mane,
Yet with intelligence infinite shining in love all-wise
Out of brilliant, not cruel, eyes;
Love in each lineament, majesty dwarfing the skies,
The God that must reign!

On Sunday night
At first we got our own suppers
When even more "on our uppers"
Than now, and the yellow lamp cast its mellow beam
On a table of picnic dream,
And we both spread many a theme
With verbal jam, like our toast. And now we do much
the same,
Save for our cook. The babies quiet down,

The street sounds drown
In darkness, the chill stars sentry the sleeping hill.
Hurry and worry are still.
Peace breathes through the town
Like a flicker of lambent flame—
Peace and good-will.

We read
According to mood and need
To each other or alone,
Remarks and laughter thrown
Hit or miss in the air to echo around the lamp
Our enthusiasms come out, nose around, unruffle their wings, and stamp,
Shake their silvery forelocks and curvet about, and champ
The golden oats of some seer's fit phrase
That we feed them, some poet's blossomy, succulent bays.
And then we sit and gaze
Long at a picture, and think that we think instead
Of merely rechewing a chewed-out cud of the last thing said,
And we simply cannot haul a heavy head
Up thought's frail, difficult, gleaming spider-thread.
And it's time for the baby's bottle, and time—to—go—to—bed.

I lie in my bed, and think of my soul, and decide
I am only a mixture of animal spirits and pride

And conventional sleekness and sudden emotional
blether,
And I don't know whether
I *have* a soul; but I lie in my bed and see
A bright-green star in a violet haze through a moon-
stark tree.
Whee-ee-ee!

NIGHT–MOTORING

The high moon swinging before,
And the big car swaying,
Lifting the grade with a roar,
Swerving and sliding,
Leaping and purring, and playing
With its insolent power, and checking and drifting and gliding!
The stare and glare of the light that scouted before us
From a lip of curved shadow etched out the detail of the road
Like a white, incandescent river, rippling and fleet, flowing to meet
Our swift tyre's muffled and crisping, monotonous chorus—
Hallelujah! the stride that we strode!

The wind whipped our cheeks till all being softened and glowed
Or flashed with a glacial brilliance, and throbbed in our ears
A steady pulsation surmounting and merging all fears
And cares in some spirit triumph beyond the years.

Things lunged at us out of the night,
Great masses of shadow hurled past;
Yellow eyes down the road blazed bright;

Our horn blew a Gabriel-blast:
With a fillip of dust they were gone.
Our car swayed on.

Trees leaped toward our spectral light,
Every leaf, in its ray, yellow-sere with some leprous blight,
It seemed, every leaf-notch distinct!
Grass flowed past, of a poisonous green,
Further shadows were ebony-inked;
Like a painted canvas scene,
Everything flashed unreal and flat to the eye,
Faked, artificial, and mean.
But in distance, beyond the unreeling white fences,
Where the landscape moved more slowly,
The moon, that absolves and dispenses,
Made all things holy.

The square orange windows of farms
Where dark woodlands stretched slumberous arms,
The surging great hills, vague and proud,
The silvery curdle of cloud—
All composed to a wonderful, soft-hued, visual prayer.
The rich, passionate land lay bare
To the nuptials of fierce white stars; and the hissing wind in our hair
That started our strained eyes moist with its swift, cold kiss,
Taught our swooning and leaping blood of this
Strange, sorrow-begetting bliss,

This heartrending, ecstatic embrace
Disembodied, that thrills through the tremulous air of night
Stirring the thought to delirious flight
Into fathomless space.

Corn-shocks, close by, stood out sudden like some weird herd
Of tousled beasts. Like a lion's our greeting purred.
Where the road was mending, each stealthy assassin shadow
Leaped alertly behind its heap of gray cut-stone,
And merged in the dusk of the meadow.

We flew not alone.
By the side of our car its own shadow swayed
And towered in the trees, ran the walls, unafraid
Of the threatened raid from each ambuscade
Of crouching houses or lurking hedges.
Far down the road three ruby lights
Appeared at its edges.
We took the planks of a bridge with a rippling jar;
We whirled to the heights;
And then our car
Plunged through a tunnel of purple gloom,
Shaking volleys of bloom
From trespassing boughs and bushes, and flung in a last flight down
To the glow on the sky of the thousand-tentacled town!

THE ASYLUM

I love my asylum,
My home in the skies,
Splashed with splendid color,
Drenched in dazzling dyes:
Clouds and winds and oceans,
Blue above—below.
I love my asylum. . .
But the other inmates? *No!*

All in our asylum
Are mad as can be.
I stick my tongue at them.
They stick their tongues at me.
And purple authorities
And gilded bloody gods
All rule in our asylum
With black whips and rods.

And men cry Alleluia
To hop-toads with wings;
And women love poodles;
And all love breaking things,
Love swearing and peering,
Love reptiles and lice. . .
You see, in my asylum
It isn't very nice.

But sometimes the windows
Are burst by magic dawns,
And then we see far vistas
Of star-embroidered lawns
Where rational angels
Are laughing like fun.
But, of course, in our asylum
It *simply isn't done!*

So one wears a crown,
One piles his gold in rows,
One balances a feather
On the end of his nose.
One's a sword-swallower,
One mumbles One-two-three.
And all in our asylum
Are unhappy as can be.

For, you see, the whole trouble
(Though we're absolutely mad)
Is, we fear a strange sensation
We have sometimes had.
So sometimes we huddle close
And clutch at heart and brain.
For I'll tell you what's the trouble:
We're afraid of going—sane!

THE BLACKAMOOR'S PANTOMIME

Personages: The Clown Introducer.
The Villain of the Piece.
The Lady Truth.
The Watchman.
The Blackamoor.
The Proprietor.

Interludes: The Yellow Cook, the Hobby-horse Knight, the Dragon.
The Smiler and a Succession of Suitors.

* * * * * * * *

Start the music softly, as a delicate mist is shaken, for a thousand folded butterflies of rose and blue and brown

Are tremoring on a golden gauze with stirring wings that waken in the patterns of this curtain now presented by the Clown.

With his wand of intricate ivory—its tip an emerald gleam—he obsesses and distresses like the poignance of a dream;

Stay! Our sighs may well come after. Now Delight would dance with Laughter. Floury-faced the Clown is smiling, in his clothes of silver-cream.

Crimson pompom buttons shaking, and his tall cap tinkling bells, his strutting, baggy waggishness entices and compels;

And be certain to watch the curtain,—how its patterns
shift and blend, rich and splendid till—the end—
There! They float to butterflies.
What bewildering brilliant dyes flutter and whirl and
waft and rise, in a breath, beyond our eyes!

Now the golden gauze but hazes, now the gaze is
dazed outright
By a yellow moon benignant over hills in purple
night.
There's a foreground drenched in white, glimmering
white, that plays in mazes.
Here's the House of Cards before us, in a country of
delight.

Oh what best of all surprises! for the cards are mam-
moth sizes, and their ebony pips and scarlet, and
the heads of queens and kings
Brave with color, stare and charm us; and the House
would fain disarm us, with its one red-curtained
window, and its thread of smoke that swings
In a faint and violet spiral dim and gyral toward the
canopy, and curling down and twirling makes its
exit through the wings.

To left of stage the House is set. A red brick wall
beside
Runs clean across the stage to right. The double
gates are green

And wide. Behind them spreads a tree, high enough
not to hide
Their height, with fringy creepers hung dim-tinted
blooms between.
Beyond the garden heap the hills—blue, low, and
moon-delighted.
Now, from the right, a figure steals beneath the
garden-wall.

His doublet's pied, his sleeves are slashed, his boots
are splashed. Benighted,
In gilded mask, with suavest grace, he makes his bow
to all.

He turns his face. You see
A subtle gleam of glee.
Dagger-like black mustachios,
Dagger-like beard has he.

With a sudden savage gesture, sure to test your mental
poise,
He waves one arm, and over it floats his Harmony-
cloak, with musical notes
Twining its snow-white lining.
Far that inky shadow falls
Over garden, house, and walls,
As a thunder-cloud deploys. . .

Zing!

A stride,
Two catlike strides that undulate, and he has reached
the garden-gate.
A heavy key he draws,
Clicks locks without a pause,
Opens the gates a crevice, whirls his arms,—one final
fling,
And he's inside!

"Who was he?" buzz the voices from the white and
floating faces
Of the audience vapor-moulded to an ocean foaming free.
"Yes, who is he?" . . They are dizzy with the dubious
trail he traces
Through the gate of lost illusions that is called Expe-
diency.
"Can it be that garden guards . . ?"

Hush! The bright red shutters open in the vivid House
of Cards.

Like a flower afloat
Her face and throat
Lift agleam from her drab dark dress.
Her hair is a blaze
Of broad sun-rays
Caught close and braided above her brows.
She twines her fingers.
A sad smile lingers
On perfect lips. Her eyes distress

Dumbly seeks,
And her gesture speaks
Of the gloom of her room
In that tight card-house.

She fades, reappears
With a sea-green gown
Laid out on her arms—and shakes it down
From the window-sill. It is looped and twined
With flowers of every color and kind.
As it sways and turns
Each glows and burns
And gladdens the eyes
With its dew-bright dyes. . .
She withdraws it then—
With kisses and tears
Crushes it close—and disappears.

In her drab black dress she is seen again
Framed in the window's strict dark square,
And, leaning forth, she turns and sees
The round moon's beacon beyond that tree's
Sweep of bough.
Lovely despair
Clutches her now.
Her desperateness
Bids her stretch arms to the moon up there.

Dimly at first, in lines of light
Like cloudy fringe that trails and lightens

Across its sphere, the moon's orb brightens
Into a Face—of no mere creature—
The countenance of some angel jester
In God's white courts. . . It grows more bright.
Good for our lady! The moon has guessed her
Plight,—and so now its largest feature—
That smiling mouth—is suddenly split
Crimson and wide by a laughing-fit
Which wrinkles its eyes closed. . . Jest? Deep
earnest!
Out of that broad grin redly-furnaced
Suddenly swarms (like moths against
A glowing lamp benign and spherical)
A fluttering flight of elves, dispensed
From heaven's store-house of things chimærical . .
And immediately our mazed eyes find
Dazzling streams of silver beams
Which the moon has spread to the dusk behind
That garden-wall! All spangled white
An elf-troop descends those roads of light!

Moon's mouth claps shut on that sudden dawn.
In a wink each silver beam's withdrawn.
And still, as we all watch deep in thrall
Of the miracle,—see, how the garden wall
Suddenly buds with those silver caps
Feathered with blue! Gay-faced, if queer,
There they appear,
The glistening chaps,
One—six—a dozen, in satin silk-wear

With pale blue facings,—the pages' suits
Of some audience hall in the Faraway
That they and their ilk wear!
Now they display
With utter rapture—these antic mutes—
Looped from their hands in glistering strands
A silken-woven steel-strong ladder.
(Ah, how the lady's face grows gladder!)
They swing it and dance atop the wall
Then leap down lightly one and all,
Bow with politeness, and, tip-toe reaching,
Toss its gold cord to her rapt beseeching.

She has it now. She draws it in,
Flinging them kisses. They whirl a glad
Saraband,—leap the wall like mad,
And, as the Moon's face once more bursts
To a second triumphant grin, they scamper
Swift up its beams—like leaf-dry thirsts
Absorbed in a wine-cask, or mice in a hamper.
Ah, how she fondles her gift from the Moon,
Pressing its silk against her cheek!
Her eyes grow large and bright. Sweet tune
Plays on her lips. If she could but speak! . .
To a peg in the window-niche she loops
The golden cord, and the ladder droops
Over the window-sill. And still
She lingers (as every darer will),
And, as she lingers and chin-on-hand
Leans toward the garden,—that garden Tree

Lights at once from within, mysteriously;
Spreads broad ablaze (as a Djinn's command
Had waked its splendor!). Each branch bears
Golden apples or silver pears
In sheaves of jewelled emerald leaves,
And, like honey dripping among wild roses,
Sweet notes of bird-song grow to warbling
Wilder and trillier, more melodious
Than ever was heard. . . Why, the nightingale
One's yearning supposes in Arno's vale
Amid oleanders and Tuscan marbling,
To *this* were cacophonous and odious!

And the twiggy tips of the branches seem
(Enveined with life by this gorgeous dream)
To twist to letters—a fringy fire
In fading outline above the tree,
A wraith-like script that curiously
Seemed to write "ROMANCE," when its seething
glitter ate
Into the dark—did it not obliterate
Even more swiftly!

Our lady smiles
Stilly, bewildered. Then the birds
Burst into brighter cascades of words,
The gems of bird-poetry—far too clear
To be understood of the mortal ear,—
Wafture on wafture of brilliant song
In rapid ripples bestrewn with gems

From a thousand goblin diadems
Emerges in surges from the tree. . .
And there, in the background, suddenly
Two other hid trees shoot up and burst
Ablaze with flowers and fruits like jewels
And flickers of flame as from fairy fuels—
In all the grandeur of the first.

Golden-hair, in her card-board attic,
Claps her white hands, and goes ecstatic.
Farther and farther forth she strains
And twists, in her drab black dress,
As though she struggled in heavy chains . .
Until . . a bearded face—no less!—
Suddenly pushes and disengages
Itself from the fruit of the foremost tree,—
A face that palely and balefully
Yet wrinkles in smiles—and a gleam of glee.
Proud and patrician shines his nose.
Dagger-like black mustachios,
Dagger-like beard has he!

Two black-cloaked arms thrust forth. The hands
Undulate in a rhythm of passes.
Golden-hair stares. Her bright smile glasses.
What has this new strange fear to do
With her brief swift joy? She understands
Nothing, and sinks her aching forehead
Before that devil's gestures horrid. . .

And all the crimson and golden flames
Of all three trees, at a Name of Names
Whispered beneath her breath,—*burn blue!*

First Interlude

The blue light spreads and shimmers, and the large green double gateway
Of the garden straightway glimmers in a spotlight fierce and white.
Trees and house are thrown in shade, all else fades,—the sight is centred
On those gates wherethrough first entered in our Villain of a Night.
Now they softly swing ajar.
Silver-glinting like a star,
Though his armor's only pasteboard, from peaked shoe to vizor-bar,
Out there bounces—with the flounces of his Hobby-horse a shaking—
Aye, with helmet, spear, and plume, from that garden's inner gloom,
A mediæval warrior . . and few the steps he's taking
Ere a Cook, all costumed yellow from his chef-like cap aflap to his apron,—yes, a fellow of much culinary art,—
Follows quickly, smiling sickly, with his black-browed eyes a snap, and his hand upon his heart.

In his left hand—such a deft hand!—while his face in mock-disgust
Wrinkles strangling, he is dangling, well—for bear the sight you must!—
One green fish, as dead's a nail,
Though he makes it flap its tail
By a twitch
Of his wrist, . .
As the knight goes strutting by
It is swung against his open helm, and slaps him in the eye,—*which*
Beastly candor fires the dander of Sir Knight indeed. Oh, Lord,
There he draws his pasteboard sword! . .
But the Cook, his fish back-snatching, through a magnifying glass
Scans its scales, and once more scans . . while the Knight, in ire a prance,
Makes an ineffective pass.
Then the Knight more strongly pounces. . . On the flounces chintzy-gay
With which his Hobby's hung
Small bright-ribboned sachet-bags bearing many curious tags
Like "Sweetness," "Pureness," "Sentiment," are marvelously strung.
As that livid fish he catches on his spear-point, in the fray,
Some of these he quickly snatches to his pommel. Kneeling down

(While Cook goggles like a clown)
See, he lays the fish away
All embalmed in bright sachet,
In those bags of bright sachet! Then he rises to pursue
The Cook, and through the gateway straightway both elude the view!

And now our lovely Lady in her open card-house casement
Floats back within our vision. She is starting, half-awake,
But the Tree's deep branches shake
And the Villain—it is he!—
Makes more passes, one, two, three . .
With her sobs her shoulders shake
And she shudders to abasement. . .

Second Interlude

Once again the radiance leaves her, and the spot-light centres low
On the garden gates,—once more
Opening just enough to show
A green dragon who comes crawling through their gap,—and, as before,
Forth there plunges with wild lunges at this beast, as it emerges,
That same pasteboard Knight, who urges
His valanced, piebald pony
Until the combat surges

And clatters. They have scuffled
A space, when—quite unruffled,
And staggering up—the dragon,
(As if some ribald crony
Were beseeching) swiftly reaching
In his coils,—waves forth a flagon—
A frosty-beaded flagon!
And the Knight
Drops his point,
Shakes with joy in every joint
And succumbs before the Tempter, quite forgetting to "aroint."

Yes, that pure chivalric seeker
Thrusts up vizor—drains the beaker!

And it takes him with the colic
As it should do—for of course
This is equally symbolic! . .
Dragon overtilts his horse,
Smiles a wide and toothy smile to the audience, and straightway
By the heels yanks Knight and Hobby-horse within the closing gateway!

* * * * * * * *

Yet Her trance seems but the brighter, as again the scene grows lighter
And the trees blaze forth once more twice as brilliant as before

And that devil from the tree, with his weird agility,
Leaps down lightly on the wall, footing mute a sprightly dance,—
See, our Lady rises slowly, grasps the woven silken ladder,
Steps with grace upon the sill . . (Is she bending to his will,
She, the far-withheld and holy?)
Ah, his cloak is blowing, showing the false black harmonics twined
On the silk with which it's lined! It is waving in a madder
Far more evil weaving fashion! . . In his hand a gold guitar
Glitters now, as down he leaps.
Like black wings his cloak downsweeps!
Light he strolls beneath her window, thrumming, humming half a bar.

Down the silken strands she trembles, step by step, a fallen star!

She wavers. In his gratitude
He strikes a sprightly attitude.
Much old romantic platitude
He genuflects and gestures.
Then, swiftly and in passion—
And a very different fashion—
He hurls his music from him, he sweeps in all her vestures

The Lady from the ladder to his shoulder. Swift as
light
He's before the gates, within them, and they close upon
the sight,—
Till, as swift, and past our hoping,
Lo, he reappears alone!
From a pocket of his cloak he turns in the locks
A big brass key. . . Then up he leaps and rocks
With green evil silent mirth on the wall's white coping
Of moon-washed stone!

His tongue licks his cheek, an index-finger steals
Pointing to the Card House, as he kicks his heels.
With laughter he is weak. He counts in pantomime
Coins into his palm. (*More crime? More crime?*)
He streams shadow-money through his fingers, yards
and yards;
*And he gestures toward the cellar of the moonlit House
of Cards.*

As I feared,
He's disappeared
Down behind the wall.

And now the jewelled proud
*Trees in the background are extinguished. Like a
shroud*
The boughs of the big tree burn with only dim
Blue lights. The Moon's face, in heaven high a swim,
*Takes a wan pained look, through a scud of murky
cloud.*

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

Third Interlude

From the right, in a litter of shoddy glitter and cheap
gimcrackery, borne by lackeys,
Beneath the wall—funereal—enter The Smiler, stout
and bland!
In a high silk hat and a cream-colored vest with a great
gold chain, he lolls in his nest
Of rugs and cushions; and, like a sack, he's creased and
protuberant. Each fat hand
Sticks up from billows of sofa-pillows and soft suave
cushions. How ringed they are
With jewels! Each holds a black cigar winking at tip
with a faint red star. . .
They set him down before the gates, and each lackey
bows—and each lackey waits.
His heavy jowls, his flabby lips, his whole small soul
in complete eclipse,
His little swine eyes and his puffy chins—must conjure
forth sighs as well as grins.

And slowly out of the wings defile a foredoomed crew
to face his—Smile.

First comes the Poet, black-velvet clad in doublet and
hose, with ink-horn swung
At girdle,—a tow-headed likely lad of ruddy cheeks and
a smile still young.
He bows to the Smiler, unrolls his scroll, and declaims—
in silence—his passionate ire,
Reshaping the world to his soul's desire. . .

The Smiler shakes through all his girth and swings his cigar to his rhythmic mirth.
The Poet starts back in hot despair, swears blue murder and tears his hair,
And passes on . .

Next comes the Preacher
Round-collared in black. He points above,
He bangs on a book,—his every feature works with a passionate plea for love.
The Smiler motions him brusquely to pass, with a silent guffaw at his pale "Alas!"

Third of the Suitors, a man with sacks of soil. He plunges one hand in each,
And holds them high. The one word "Tax" flares black from his smock. In lieu of speech,
He shakes two green sods in the Smiler's face. But the other simply doubles in glee,
And at last, controlling one mad grimace, jabs "On!", with his thumb, to number Three.

And now a fourth Suitor meets the sight, with firm strong features and eyes alight.
He presents a small white platform set with many a dream-tower's minaret,
But based on the close-knit stones of fact. Offhand he salutes with more zest than tact
The plethoric Smiler,—and displays his model white dream, shows the many ways

Each ceiling and floor and window and door works in
that house—how every cell
Of the caravansery takes the sun—and a thousand
smaller details as well.
Indeed, as you see him rate and list 'em, from State-
ownership to the plumbing-system,
It all seems very neatly done.

But the Smiler simply bellows with mirth, and promptly
orders him off the Earth.

So, suddenly next, with a smoky torch furious crimson,
and fit to scorch
Earth and sky,—and a rolling eye and naked torso and
maniac cry,
With a red scarf knotted about his head and overalls
splashed and streaked with red,
In rushes—no Suitor!—but some man-brute, or some
devil arraigning his hoggish tutor. . .
Yet the Smiler simply claps hand on hand, chuckling,
and at that quick command
Two coal-black slaves each tall as a tower, one hung
with coins, one crowned with power,
Leap on the rebel from the rear, tread out his torch, and
then, with a leer
Shackle him fast. . . The lackeys raise their litter. . .
The Smiler rocks and sways
Kissing his hand. *All disappear.*

* * * * * * * *

And now, with a *ding,* with a *ding-dong-dang,*
Soft and afar we hear a bell's harangue:
Mellow *clang-clang-clang*
From a bell, coming nearer.
It is clearer. It ceases, and a faint voice swells
Sing-song, like the bell's—if bells but sang.

Oyez, oyez, oyez,—a-all's we-el!
Oyez, oyez, oyez,—a-all's well!

Hear it swell, nearer, clearer,—swell on widening
vibrant swell!

From the right, beneath the wall, a figure ambles with
a lantern.
It casts an orange circle on before.
His shoe-buckles glitter and his cocked hat glistens.
He raises a finger, and he stops and listens.
He smiles very wisely as he tries and tests the latches
Of the garden-door.
He hums a bit by snatches. . .
His great-coat is bulging with yellow parchment
packets.
They flutter from his pockets and bristle from his
jackets,
All sealed with red sealing-wax. Of jackets half a
score
And his great-coat and his hat he divests himself, and
rests him
On this rolled impromptu cushion by the garden-door.

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

The chimney of the House of Cards is shaking with the ague.
The smoke no longer drifts from it. A head and shoulders rise
So darkly from it suddenly, so inchoate and vague, you
Have hardly rubbed your eyes, when a figure of surprise
Worms forth erect, with bottle-brush, and crouches on the ridgepole
And listens. Then, cautiously, all black, see him lean,
Slide inkily the sloping roof and drop before the scene.

Let my words declare his wrong, in

THE BLACKAMOOR'S SILENT SONG

I am wedged in the dark, in the dim,
In the dust, in the heat.
You have said "Apple-blossoms are sweet",
But they are not for him!
You tell me that sunsets are splendid.
They have not befriended
My work in the deep-layered grime
As the chimney I climb,
The chimney of Time
In your delicate, beautiful house,
Your gay-colored retreat.

And, if chimneys let out on the skies,
With the filth in my eyes

THE BLACKAMOOR'S PANTOMIME

Late at night,—with the soot in my ears
And my eyes full of tears,
Stars are blurred, they are dizzy for me,
They are cruel to see. . .
Oh ye fortunate, hearken the poor
Stifled song of a sad Blackamoor!

In the filth, in the soot, in the grime,
I am sin, I am crime;
And you feed me the billowing smoke
Of your dreams, while I choke;
And you say that the chimney *must be*—
So I see. So I see!
But foul chimneys are frantic to cure
The despair of a poor Blackamoor!

But our fires must be kindled, you say,—
Our meals cooked every day,
Our dreams dreamed in the selfish old way,—
Man, the world is gay—*gay!*
Man, have faith,—oh, be humble, repine
Not for jewel or vine,—
Clean our chimney, and sweat, and be sure
God remembers a poor Blackamoor!

But—I point to that moon, and I swear
By tonight's fragrant air,
I shall sit in her Ivory Chair.
Since your joy is my bitter despair,

I shall rend, I shall strive, I shall dare!
Card-House folk, have a care!
All the dirtiness man may endure
Has been fed to this poor Blackamoor!

* * * * * * * *

He is a limber lad indeed, for all the soot he shows.
He capers in the moonlight, sets a finger by his nose,
And steals to where the sleeping watchman snores in golden doze.
He tries the door. 'Tis locked. But is his venture blocked?
Ah no! He filches craftily, while the sleeper twitches dreamfully, his ponderous and golden key.
He turns it in the channels. Right! The gate swings inward on—the night!
Black velvet night, with whispering leaves. . . But what is this we see?
To the tall and moon-etched trunk of that overhanging tree,
As the gates are opened wide,
For the first time and the last,
And the spotlight seeks and finds her—there's our golden girl—bound fast,
Hair dishevelled—*there—inside!*
And the web-work that enwinds her is a maze of colored ribbons tightly bound, but strong as steel.
They are twisted neck to ankles. Round the trunk they wrap and reel.

Down the Blackamoor drops, distraught,
On his knees; and, frenzied then,
In the agony of his thought,
Leaps outside and in again,—
Fears to touch her,—suddenly
Clasps his arms around—the tree,
And uproots it!
In an instant (here the kettledrums should thunder)
Pale blue flames shoot up from under and the branches wither blackly.
Yet, though ribbon-bonds fall slackly,—prone our Lady sinks, a faint.

Then the Blackamoor, anguish-shaken, easing down the withered tree,
Wildly and amazedly
Bends and listens o'er his saint,
Rushes forth by wit forsaken,
Cracks his knuckles furiously,
And, as now he gestures madder,
Suddenly sights the silken ladder
From the open Card-House window—scuds across and climbs its strands
Jerking nervous feet and hands,
Rubs his chin
And enters in. . .

The red shutters clap behind him . . and the caterwauls begin!
Inner riot shakes those shutters.

Watchman wakens all a pout.
Sits up slowly, blinks in doubt,
Listens, raises both his eyebrows as to say, "What's this about?",
And carefully and prayerfully puts on his many jackets,
And stolidly and solidly restores his red-taped packets
To each capacious pocket, takes his lantern, throws the chest of him—
Or his hummock of a stomach that projects beyond the rest of him—
And, waddling with dignity, he reaches up and raps
At those shutters.
Immediate each scarlet shutter claps
Widely open. In striped night-cap and a wildly whiskered face
The Proprietor appears, furious crimson to the ears,—
And he holds the Blackamoor by a clutch both fierce and sure
In disgrace!

Oh their gestures and grimaces, oh the faces that they make!
If they only were to talk it, every soul would start awake
In that strange and eerie country. Ah, but see!
While still they wrangle,
Bicker and objurgate and jangle,
Quite revived, our lovely Lady suddenly lifts her golden head

In the garden. Next—she's sped
Through the gates. . . Each garden-bed—
Circles, oblongs, squares or crescents—
Weirdly writhes with phosphorescence;
And she just has time to start
Against one wall, with arms outspread,
When—the Villain comes prancing out
With green baleful looks that dart.
And behold! beneath his cloak
Close he hugs—the Bags of Gold
From the well-stored Card House cellar (Oh it's time
that you were told!)
But he pales with horrid doubt
In a fit that seems to choke,
Which is lovely to behold!

From the window, mouthing vainly and insanely,
fever-shook,
See the Blackamoor—pointing, panting. Then at
last—at last they look!

But the watchman's hardly agile, and a woman's grip
is fragile.
Our dagger-bearded Villain plunges snarling from the
scene.
Though he drops a tithe of treasure, what he takes is
past all measure.
So at least thinks night-capped Father by his show
of frantic spleen!

The Watchman is nonplussed. He gapes and he feels
For all of his packets in all of his pockets.
He studies their text, and he studies their seals.
He turns to the law on Purloining of Lockets.
He turns to the ordinance, penalties stating
For Eating and Sleeping by those without rating
In one of the Blue Books. He turns to the section
Of Forfeits and Fines for a Mood of Dejection.
And at last he draws forth his old pair of horn glasses
And sits down to read, open-minded and bland,
The procedure laid down by the law of the land,
Quite remote and unmoved by dull time as it passes,
But grumbling perforce at the mad "lower classes."

The Blackamoor, freed by the Father grown frantic,
Has slid down the ladder. . . He bends on one knee
To the Girl still quite wan with her struggle upon
The escape of the Villain. And yet she's romantic
Enough, 'spite her tactical grasp of the practical,
Brightly to blush at his beautiful plea.
He has won her at once. *Did he not set her free?*
From that prisoning tree?
Oh rapture! Rejoice!

And now, finding his voice,
For the one word spoken
On-stage—the whole weird silence is broken
By the Blackamoor's "*Pouf!*", as he whirls, and flings
A fist toward the House of Cards.

The night-capped Proprietor's head disappears.
The whole bright structure totters and swings,
And flatly about his astonished ears
Tumbles to gaudy shards.

Only the chimney, that drove right through
That edifice gilded and builded askew
Upthrusts in the moonlight staunch and black.
And, bowing again, the Chimney-jack
Points to its fire-place base, which seems
(In this land of dreams) like a golden door
That opens inward. . .

Out of the core
Of the chimney-breast, a Beautiful Thing
In soft silver drest, and with either wing
Of glittering, dazzling pearl,
Suddenly stands
With outstretched hands
And beckons the happy Blackamoor
To enter in through that shining door
With his glorious golden girl!

MAD BLAKE

Blake saw a treefull of angels at Peckham Rye,
And his hands could lay hold on the tiger's terrible heart.
Blake knew how deep is Hell, and Heaven how high,
And could build the universe from one tiny part.
Blake heard the asides of God, as with furrowed brow
He sifts the star-streams between the Then and the Now,
In vast infant sagacity brooding, an infant's grace
Shining serene on his simple, benignant face.

Blake was mad, they say,—and Space's Pandora-box
Loosed its wonders upon him—devils, but angels indeed.
I, they say, am sane, but no key of mine unlocks
One lock of one gate wherethrough Heaven's glory is freed.
And I stand and I hold my breath, daylong, yearlong,
Out of comfort and easy dreaming evermore starting awake,—
Yearning beyond all sanity for some echo of that Song
Of Songs that was sung to the soul of the madman, Blake!

JALDABAOTH

[There is a third person in a Gnostic Creation legend from which the name of my demiurge is derived. The true legend—a snake-worshipping one—has it that Darkness, the Father of all, begot a daughter, the Wisdom of God, who knew Life; the son of her agony being Jaldavaoth, the god who creates. He creates the world of the body, a clumsy imitation of the world of the Spirit, etc. But the only borrowing from this legend has been the name of my protagonist. This is an entirely dissimilar imaginative attempt.]

In a yeast of fire-flecked mist
Beyond the paths of the planets
Strove Jaldabaoth, the strong Angel, the son of Chaos.

In that terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine Nature
In whose pleroma the sage Heracleon
Saw emanating aeons—assigned and ordered
Subordinate gods—
Time was but faint effulgence,
Scarcely a tremor in the ether.
Psyche, the sensuous soul,
Was lost in the palpitant pneuma
That quivered like heat round a flame, where Jaldabaoth
Wrestled with Chaos,
Kneading and shaping and moulding
And working and welding a world
Out of the ether,

From the negation of matter,
Alone in the wreathing, seething, monstrous mist.
Alone.

Terrible trembling and shuddering shook the abyss,
Like the rumbling hollow drums of brute barbarians
Thudded instant in repetition, purring to thunder,
Breaking and booming and roaring high to a crepitant crash
And a dazzling lightning flash,
With billows of purple smoke, rolling to inky storm,
Following after.

Then far and faint came laughter,
Tricklings of infinite laughter,
Thin streams of molten silver scattering down
Through the heavy heaven of cloud,—
Remote and ironic laughter.

Yet still strove Jaldabaoth, demiurge divine,
The strong Angel, the son of Chaos,—
Grappling the clotted and fluid cloud to his breast,
Gripping with bulging-muscled enormous thighs
The cloud-stuff to him—striving and struggling with cloud
Even as Ixion, saith legend, begat the centaurs
When Juno slipped from her white and cumulous semblance
Back to the shining gates,
Back to the laughter-clanging golden gates

Leaving her bronze-thewed lover frenziedly clinging her
image,
Clasping celestial cheat.

Horns in the heaven,
Flaring horns of scorn from the corners of heaven
Wound wire-cruel sound
And fierce flagellation
Round the soul of Jaldabaoth.

But in his arms
As clay is kneaded and worked
A world took form.

Then the strong Angel
Stooped 'neath his feet for a fiery sun,
Shattered it 'twixt the gripe of his fingers, let fall
The glistering, glowing fragments in midst of his world,
Strewing the shards as a man sows seed,—
Scattering them.

And again,
And again
He kneaded and worked his world between his knees
Till his eyes were blind with sweat.

Jaldabaoth
Flung forth one arm, and snatched a golden web
Of glimmering stars out of the misty abyss,
And crushed them to paste against the arch of his thigh

And powdered them to fine dust beneath his heel
And mixed them into the spinning maelstrom of his world,
And his world quickened and twirled and shaped toward a sphere.

His world convulsed, and flickered with gaseous fumes,
And flared into flame.

And Jaldabaoth drenched it with hissing mist.

His world flung off planet on planet
Like smoke-rings or bubbles blown.
They spun in eccentric orbits. . . Centring them all
The coagulate matter dwindled and dwindled to throbbing pulses
Of rosy or crimson embers,
And so diminished
Into a central sun
Of quivering heat and light.

And that first sun cooled, and the planets clanged in anger,
And hissed in mist—and another glowing sun
Swam forth, and other orbits ellipsed its Space.

Jaldabaoth was resting.
He squatted on sinewy heels above his world
Of little silver planets and golden suns—

And infinitesimal gems of sapphire water
Winking back from some turning sphere.

He had not yet made Man.

His agate eyes were full of the lack . . but behind him
Came God, as one walks in a garden, and laid his touch
On his shoulder. And the flame-haired head flung back
And Jaldabaoth looked into the eyes of God.

And God breathed on his Angel's world,
Making Man.
And God drew blue skies like the folds of a cloak about
his face
And trod once more on his rounds of Eternity
To the next white outpost of the next demiurge.

Then languor and idleness came on that strong Angel.
Centuries passed as he slowly turned on his side
And stretched luxuriously,
For he was weary.

And then first on his eyes he was 'ware of a prickling
and tingling
And then a tremor that startled through all his being,
A tremor he could not still.
His lazy lids opened. He peered through cloud on his
world.
It spun in its Space like small and rhythmic sound.

Yet something like a fizzing of very tiny flies
Perturbed its whirl.

And again the pricking and tingling through the being
Of Jaldabaoth.

For upon its smallest of planets, on one of the tiniest
islands,
The first, fur-skinned, flint-axed Doubter had whispered
"Why?"

Then Jaldabaoth was wroth, and he sent a plague and
an earthquake,
And the voice was still.

And the Angel sank back, and slumbered, and centuries
passed.

Again the prickling and tingling,
More irritant now, more and more insistent. . .
Cities were spread on one planet. In one of the cities
A scientist in an infinitesimal laboratory
Laid his weary forehead down 'mid a stench of bubbling
test-tubes
And shuddered "Why?"
And out of the alleys of cities
Oppression and extortion and filth and famine
Fumed upward "Why?"—and in a house of healing

JALDABAOTH

A surgeon with baffled scalpel above a twisted wreck
half-human,
That his work had saved to life, cursed coldly, "Why?"
A farmer's wife scanning an empty prairie
Echoed his thought.
A clerk at his desk, a doughty general dying,
In half-delirium, played with the answerless question.
Youth and age and houses of death and birth
And camp and court and land and sea unceasing
Reiterated the word in many tongues.

"Is there a God? Who is our God, and Why?
What is this life? And *Why?*"

Jaldabaoth, rousing, gazed at his world
With wild new wonder . .
And, as he gazed, his gaze
Grew microscopic, and centred upon one city
Set in the midst of a planet, and on one house
Set in the midst of that city, and on one room
In the house, and the smiling face of the man in that
room.
The smile was not good to see.

The man sat at a desk littered with papers,
A pen in his hand.

The man's lip curled, as he said:
"God or no God, I had made a better world.
God or no God, I defy you, I blaspheme you.

All has been taken from me except one thing
My hate of you.
Your priesthood is great—for all men are afraid.
But I am not afraid.
I am the least of atoms in your bad universe,
Urged to obey your laws.
Fed with fancies, creating superstitions,
Cheating and killing each other,
Juggling their Justice and Sunday Righteousness,
Clutching, snarling and denying,
Your 'children' swarm on this planet, and crawl to Fear.
But I am not afraid.
Visit me now with sudden and visible torture,
Kill me slowly in one of your sweet and infinite
Tortures reserved for the brave,
Shred me between your fingers now or soon,
After your high and holy Godlike fashion;
Set me riddles, and kill that I cannot solve them,
Damn the brain and the heart you made to beat
Out of your infinite mercy. . .
I am not afraid.
I hate you, I blaspheme you!"

The earth-creature's brain sucked down the very soul
Of Jaldabaoth, and laughed and mocked in its light.

And the son of Chaos looked on his son of chaos
And saw no fear.

Then Jaldabaoth was afraid.

With a vast and terrible wrench he freed his eyes
And his soul from the eyes and soul of the earthly
brain. . .
And the form of the man on earth swayed in his chair
And sprawled to the floor in death.

But fixed in the being of Jaldabaoth, he became
A troubling mote, a stinging vexation of spirit.
So the strong Angel rose, and staggered, and reeled
Through the terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine
Nature,
To find God.

But God was with His Angel as a vast and invisible
power
That knew his questions: "Why have You made us then
To make such toys?" and "These toys are terrible,
A vengeance, a sharp disaster!" and, worst of all,
"I have miscreated! Fiends, we are fiends, we are
fiends!"

The eyes of the Angel dilated and diminished
With blazing torture, the ether shuddered around him.
He whirled on his steps as if to strive with God.

But God was both near and remote, and could not be
grasped.

Then down in utter agony, Jaldabaoth
Sank, and the darkness was sick with his horrible tears.

And over and over again
"What is this Life we have played with!" he sobbed
and sobbed.
"What is this Life—and *Why?*"

Then speaking in perfect silence God answered, saying:
"You too are only a thought within my brain,
A figment of my fancy,
A thing contrived.
But that which is created in my fancy,
A part of my thought,
Can never die, but must have eternal life.
For I am eternal, awfully eternal,
And there is no end.
But my thought had pity on me,
And it made for me metes and bounds, and anger and
tears,
And joy and sorrow . .
And aeons, and angels, and men to rejoice and despair.
I am the father of all, unutterably lonely,
Save for my thoughts that are ye.
Ye all are stored in my memory that is Heaven,
There shall ye rest.
But while ye are my thoughts ye can have no rest,
For my Thought is forever the drudge of timeless
time. . .
But when my own thought sickens, I seek for a new
Mood and manner of thought. . .
Therefore come rest in my memory, Jaldabaoth.
This mood of my thought is done."

JALDABAOTH

And the voice ceased, and the void reeled, and the strong
Angel
Basked in the retrospect of the infinite brain.

HOW TO CATCH UNICORNS

Its cloven hoofprint on the sand
Will lead you—where?
Into a phantasmagoric land—
Beware!

There all the bright streams run up-hill.
The birds on every tree are still.
But from stocks and stones clear voices come
That should be dumb.

If you have taken along a net,
A noose, a prod,
You'll be waiting in the forest yet . .
Nid—nod!

In a virgin's lap the beast slept sound,
They say . . but I—but I—
I think (Is anyone around?)
That's just a lie!

If you have taken a musketoon
To flinders 'twill flash 'neath the wizard moon.
So *I* should take browned batter-cake,
Hot-buttered inside, like foam to flake.

HOW TO CATCH UNICORNS

And I should take an easy heart
And a whimsical face,
And a tied-up lunch of sandwich and tart,
And spread a cloth in the open chase.

And then I should pretend to snore.

And I'd hear a snort, and I'd hear a roar,
The wind of a mane and a tail, and four
Wild hoofs prancing the forest-floor.

And I'd open my eyes on a flashing horn—
And see the Unicorn!

Paladins fierce and virgins sweet . .
But he's never had anything to eat!
Knights have tramped in their iron-mong'ry . .
But nobody thought—that's all!—*he's hungry!*

Addendum

Really hungry! Good Lord deliver us,
The Unicorn is not *carnivorous!*

THE HORSE THIEF

There he moved, cropping the grass at the purple
canyon's lip.
His mane was mixed with the moonlight that silvered
his snow-white side,
For the moon sailed out of a cloud with the wake of a
spectral ship.
I crouched and I crawled on my belly, my lariat coil
looped wide.

Dimly and dark the mesas broke on the starry sky.
A pall covered every color of their gorgeous glory at
noon.
I smelt the yucca and mesquite, and stifled my heart's
quick cry,
And wormed and crawled on my belly to where he
moved against the moon!

Some Moorish barb was that mustang's sire. His lines
were beyond all wonder.
From the prick of his ears to the flow of his tail he
ached in my throat and eyes.
Steel and velvet grace! As the prophet says, God had
"clothed his neck with thunder."
Oh, marvelous with the drifting cloud he drifted
across the skies!

And then I was near at hand—crouched, and balanced,
and cast the coil;
And the moon was smothered in cloud, and the rope
through my hands with a rip!
But somehow I gripped and clung, with the blood in my
brain a boil,—
With a turn round the rugged tree-stump there on the
purple canyon's lip.

Right into the stars he reared aloft, his red eye rolling
and raging.
He whirled and sunfished and lashed, and rocked the
earth to thunder and flame.
He squealed like a regular devil horse. I was haggard
and spent and aging—
Roped clean, but almost storming clear, his fury too
fierce to tame.

And I cursed myself for a tenderfoot moon-dazzled to
play the part,
But I was doubly desperate then, with the posse
pulled out from town,
Or I'd never have tried it. I only knew I must get a
mount and a start.
The filly had snapped her foreleg short. I had had to
shoot her down.

So there he struggled and strangled, and I snubbed him
around the tree.

Nearer, a little nearer—hoofs planted, and lolling tongue—
Till a sudden slack pitched me backward. He reared right on top of me.
Mother of God—that moment! He missed me . . and up I swung.

Somehow, gone daft completely and clawing a bunch of his mane,
As he stumbled and tripped in the lariat, there I was—up and astride
And cursing for seven counties! And the mustang? *Just insane!*
Crack-bang! went the rope; we cannoned off the tree—then—gods, that ride!

A rocket—that's all, a rocket! I dug with my teeth and nails.
Why, we never hit even the high spots (though I hardly remember things),
But I heard a monstrous booming like a thunder of flapping sails
When he spread—well, *call* me a liar!—when he spread those wings, those wings!

So white that my eyes were blinded, thick-feathered and wide unfurled,
They beat the air into billows. We sailed, and the earth was gone.

Canyon and desert and mesa withered below, with the world.
And then I knew that mustang; for I—was Bellerophon!

Yes, glad as the Greek, and mounted on a horse of the elder gods,
With never a magic bridle or a fountain-mirror nigh!
My chaps and spurs and holster must have looked it?
What's the odds?
I'd a leg over lightning and thunder, careering across the sky!

And forever streaming before me, fanning my forehead cool,
Flowed a mane of molten silver; and just before my thighs
(As I gripped his velvet-muscled ribs, while I cursed myself for a fool),
The steady pulse of those pinions—their wonderful fall and rise!

The bandanna I bought in Bowie blew loose and whipped from my neck.
My shirt was stuck to my shoulders and ribboning out behind.
The stars were dancing, wheeling and glancing, dipping with smirk and beck.
The clouds were flowing, dusking and glowing. We rode a roaring wind.

We soared through the silver starlight to knock at the planets' gates.
New shimmering constellations came whirling into our ken.
Red stars and green and golden swung out of the void that waits
For man's great last adventure; the Signs took shape—and then

I knew the lines of that Centaur the moment I saw him come!
The musical box of the heavens all around us rolled to a tune
That tinkled and chimed and trilled with silver sounds that struck you dumb,
As if some archangel were grinding out the music of the moon.

Melody-drunk on the Milky Way, as we swept and soared hilarious,
Full in our pathway, sudden he stood—the Centaur of the Stars,
Flashing from head and hoofs and breast! I knew him for Sagittarius.
He reared, and bent and drew his bow. He crouched as a boxer spars.

Flung back on his haunches, weird he loomed—then leapt—and the dim void lightened.
Old White Wings shied and swerved aside, and fled from the splendor-shod.

Through a flashing welter of worlds we charged. I knew why my horse was frightened.
He *had* two faces—a dog's and a man's—that Babylonian god!

Also, he followed us real as fear. Ping! went an arrow past.
My broncho buck-jumped, humping high. We plunged . . I guess that's all!
I lay on the purple canyon's lip, when I opened my eyes at last—
Stiff and sore and my head like a drum, but I broke no bones in the fall.

So you know—and now you may string me up. Such was the way you caught me.
Thank you for letting me tell it straight, though you never could greatly care.
For I took a horse that wasn't mine! . . But there's one the heavens brought me,
And I'll hang right happy, because I know he is waiting for me up there.

From creamy muzzle to cannon-bone, by God, he's a peerless wonder!
He is steel and velvet and furnace-fire, and death's supremest prize;
And never again shall be roped on earth that neck that is "clothed with thunder" . .
String me up, Dave! Go dig my grave! *I rode him across the skies!*

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

From Tenderloin to Barbary Coast
"Red" Leary made, and backed, his boast.
From Jersey City to The Loop
He reefed the leathers or used "the soup."
Safe-cracker, dipper, climber, yegg,
He was one thorough rotten egg
The cops and flatties could not catch.
Plain-clothes-men knew him for their match.

The English bobbies failed to grapple
With what he plotted in Whitechapel.
Paris Apaches in their cellar
Called him the French for "reg'lar feller."
But footloose he must ever be,
And so he wandered far and free,
Marked on the Little Black Book's page
By name and alias, deeds and age.

He never "brassed up" on a dollar
And seemed chimaerical to collar.
Even bull-buster on occasion,
When they had needed swift persuasion,
Though he'd been mugged in youth, and measured,
(A high distinction that he treasured!)
His stretch in Stir should never be—
"Sooner, Cell 99!" swore he.

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC

One summer, after lying low,
He rather took a shine to go
Abroad once more, and, with this notion,
"Stowed" over the Atlantic Ocean.
After adventures smooth as syrup
He found himself afoot through "Yirrup"
Glad as a lad; then, growing dreamier,
Lost himself somewhere in Bohemia.

Now in that kingdom there's a town
Which no geographies have down,
An old lost town, given to amazing
Black art, and star- and crystal-gazing.
A magic circle hems it round,
(Perhaps that's why 'tis still unfound!)
And still 'tis ruled the rumor tells us
By those who once knew Paracelsus.

"There be twelve houses in the skies,"
Say these graybeards, toothy-wise,
Each wagging beard and fumbling globe
Hid in his scorpion-spangled robe,
"Twelve houses in the heavens that rise
Wherethrough the Seven Planets move,—
Venus that is the Queen of Love,
Saturn, whose spinning rings wake whirring tunes,
Uranus, circled with revolving moons,
Neptune, three billion miles away
From Earth's dim and dismal day,

Banded Jupiter, red Mars,—
Mercury, youngest of the stars.
And we be those can shape from these
Water and fire and air's triplicities,
The balm of friends, the curse of enemies,
Health, wealth, fortune or estate,
Marriage, love, and mischief great,
By orbs and intercepted signs,
Aspects, degrees, and peregrines.

"Six houses East, six houses West,
And the ephemeris gives the rest.
And hues there be, and gems, and functions
Of each great star in its conjunctions
On the glittering stellar track
With symbols of the Zodiac
Where Lion or Ram or Goat appear
Or Crab or Archer rise anear,
All as the months make up the year.
Last—there's a Golden Man on high,
Stretched on the starscape of the sky.
The first house hath his face, the second
The ruler of his neck is reckoned,
The third hath shoulders, arms, and hands,—
Each of the others some part commands.
The tenth rules downward from his thighs,
Eleventh to where his ankles rise,
And the twelfth completes his span
At the feet of the Golden Man!"

Such was their lore, with volumes more,
As who—and why—was king-to-be,
Beggar or tyrant, drunkard, dreamer,
Philosopher or busy schemer,
Hermit or sailor on the sea.
By the stars they knew it well,
And so each graybeard swung his bell,
"Fortunes to tell! Fortunes to tell!"

And then with them there came to dwell
Our very modern son of fury
Who laughed at law and judge and jury.
Ragged, and roving with his grudge,
One violet evening, through a haze
Of golden dust, they saw him trudge
Up on their ancient cobbled ways.
"Say! Pipe dis burg!" they heard him mutter,
As he sat down above a gutter.

They marked him, keen to tell his fortune.
Rustling they gathered to importune
His leave to cast a horoscope
And read i' the stars the gibbet-rope
That dangled for him. *"Hunh?"* he said.
He scanned them well. He shook his head.
"De whole push beats it! See?" he said.

They saw. They gabbled off to bed.

In the astrologers' old town
The roofs peaked up, the moon blazed down.
A shop-sign creaked, a hinge made plaint.
The shadows lay like purple paint.
All were long abed and snoring,
Save in the gutter, rags aflutter,
"Red" Leary raised his eyes, imploring
The moon some oracle to utter.
He heard the whine and clap of a shutter
Unfastened—but he heard the din
That noisy noses made within.

He shook his fist. For he had robbed
A king's palace, a thieves' kitchen,—
Been postered, trailed, and almost jobbed,—
House-climbed, house-broke, been starved—and rich—in
A hundred cities. So now he sobbed
To think that here he sat this ditch in
Simply flat bored by plate or purse.
Grievously he began to curse.
"Front Office nor de Eyes can't catch me.
Aint no new steer me bean kin hatch me.
Me, wot's de icin' on de cake,
Bawlin' 'sif me heart 'd break!
Got dem all buffaloed wit' each new string
O' dope,—aint no hand-painted shoestring
At dat! But O, dis *enny-wee!*
O me aunt's cat,—O dearie me,
It's fierce!" He fumbled in his rags
Producing two fat-stomached bags.

He pulled their strings and let them litter
The muddy gutter with chinking glitter.
"All kinds o' coin!" he said, and sighed.
"What's-it, when I hev lost me pride?
Hully-chee, fer a job ter do!"
"Yoo-hoo!" he yawned. "A-yay-yoo-hoo!"

So it began
That the Golden Man
Glimmered out of the heavens on him.
Sudden as flame
The vision came
And all the sky around was dim.
In outline huge
Past subterfuge
He saw those massive limbs that span
All stellar roads,
And the twelve abodes
From forehead to feet of the Golden Man.
Have you ever traced the Greater Bear
Or Orion with his Belt, up there?
This shimmering shape
On the vast starscape
Shone clearer far through that dazzled air.

The thief was aware it bristled his hair.
Softly it faded. There alone,
Lit like a star,
With doors ajar,
Atwinkle the Twelve High Houses shone!

Atwinkle one instant. They faded too.
His hot stare drew through a gulf of blue.
Loud in his brain the rumbling grew
Of some momentous event that neared.
The Seven Candlesticks of light,
Those wandering fires of heaven, shone bright.
Phalanx on phalanx filled the height
With stars accoutred and silver-speared.

Till, as though (as the ancient spells require!)
He had cast in a greenish sea-coal fire
The herb centaury,—filled with desire
To see all the stars ride atilt on high,—
They trembled and seemed to begin a tourney
Madly, and he a momentous journey.
Tick of the instant—no time to mourn!—he
Suddenly rose through the Eastern sky.

Up, up, up from the roofs and steeples,
Astrologers and snoring peoples,
He rose like a planet, yes, seemed to sweep else-
Where with a comet's fizzling trail.
On the Eastern horizon then, aglimmer,
He stretched his arms like a diving swimmer,—
Gasping, plunged, and grew much dimmer,—
In fact in a flick he was past all hail!

Where did he get to? Well, what *he* thought it
Was, was a downhill street. God wrought it
Of clouds like cobblestones. Unbesought, it

Gleamed underfoot. He was feeling great!
All night was before him. His "drag" and "buster"
Would set him to rights as a claim-adjuster
With—see those Houses? "Them parties muster
Been hittin' de hay since ha' pass eight!"

"So-o, easy does it! I got me creepers,
An' dem in dere's like de Seven Sleepers.
Bet dere's plate an' stuff ter bug yer peepers!"
He eyed the twelve abodes in a row
Adown their long foggy road defiling,
Then pushed up a sash—at its creak reviling—
And—that was the last of his easy smiling.
Let me make it clear why this was so:

Heaven's orb, they say, has four divisions,
Four quadrants, each strict as a mathematician's,
Marked out by astrologer precisians
From where overhead in a perfect arc
Th' Prime Vertical their code supposes
Encircles space. Each quadrant shows us
Three subdivisions. Thus Night incloses
Our world in diagrammed Delphic dark.

And, horizon to nadir, (while Man has slumbered)
From the East, under Earth, these skies they've numbered
To the West, to the zenith. Not houses cumbered
With walls and windows—but still a span
Of symbolic "houses," for sun and moon

And the constellations, late or soon,
To traverse majestical, night and noon,
From meridian to meridian.

Was the star-men's spell upon their guest
Who had scorned them so lately? His new house-quest
Really circled the sky from East to West,
For the window he'd pried to those first strange halls
Was the "cusp" to the house of the Ram's bright sign,
Hot and luxurious, fumed with wine,
Where a hangdog Saturn sate to dine
Satellite-crowned against crimson walls!

And, *"Copped out!"* yelped our thief, in this hall of fire
Lit by ruddy Mars' own wrathful ire.
"Red" whirled for an exit, found his desire,
And pelted therefrom in mad career,
But only *into*—the House of Taurus
Succedent,—and there heard a bellowed chorus
From Mars and Jupiter: "Bring before us—
Hey, boy! Bring white Queen Venus here!"

So thence through Mercury's home diurnal
He fled on the wings of a fate infernal,
Where the Twins of Gemini seemed to burn, all
Silver, on hot aerial blue,—
Till Nethermost Heaven, of Cancer's ruling,
Surrounded him next with watery, cooling,
Glimmering halls,—pale moonlight pooling
Floors and dais with pearlbright dew.

And from this Fifth House, most eerily yelling,
He soared through the "Part of Fortune's" dwelling,—
(That astrological symbol, telling
Of money, property, gain or loss,)
Leo's house, in the West's ascendant angle
Where the Sun, his beard in a golden tangle,
Watched Venus in Libra softly wrangle
With Mercury, playing at pitch and toss.

He caught their expressions,—that gleaming flagon
Sol tilted up,—and the Tail of the Dragon
Curled through the door,—yet could not lag on
His wild house-breaking. . . Through silken suites
Sacred to Venus—and overheated!—
He flip-flopped then, while his brain repeated
"Watch yer step!"—as, Subway-seated,
He remembered the guards call the different streets.

Then the darkness hissed. Cold, damp, nocturnal
Was Scorpio's home, and deceits infernal
Crawled on its walls; and there eternal
The shield of Mars hung in ruddy rust,
Norsemen and pirates ruling of olden. . .
Then the Archer's abode of Jove rose golden.
The thief flashed through it,—no longer bold,—in
A cyclone of kicked-up stellar dust.

Next two cold Houses, where, white beard flashing,
Capricornus the Goat met his eyes, abashing
Leary, who sprawled and came down crashing

Through Saturn's best mirror—and dodged away
With a leap through the sash of one window dimmer
With violet light. . . White, white and aglimmer
There the Moon's throne rose. Through pale green shimmer
Aquarius swam like a fish at play.

So on to the Twelfth, and the Cadent, dwelling
Of finny Pisces, madly pellmelling
Our burglar plunged. There remains for telling
Only the Head of the Dragon *there,*
Which yawned at him wide—white teeth like planets.
I do not believe a giant could span its
Jaws, dripping sunsets. A grin, it ran its
Tongue of black midnight around its lair.

Yet now, on completing this sky-rotation,
Strangely Leary shook with vexation—
Or was it terror? An alteration
Was plain in lax mouth and bulging eye.
And—what was that, that ominous roaring?
He dove down the Eastern sky, imploring
The gods for rescue. . . But down came pouring
Behind him, all heaven in hue and cry!

"Stop thief!" they shouted. With vestments surging
And hair astream, leapt Virgo the Virgin
Waving the Scales, the weird chase urging,
Followed by Scorpio, Capricorn,
Sagittarius and Aquarius,

The Ram, Bull, Crab, and both hilarious
Gemini—each with weapons various,
Fishnet or quiver, claw or horn.

And then, the Planets!
Ah well,
Of course he fell
Sheer through the chimneypots, flop to the moonlit street.
But what he said I think I shall not tell.
His language was too luscious to repeat.
However, from where he listened through his shuttered
Window, the Chief Star-Gazer giggled, muttered
In crafty bliss, and scraped each parchment hand
Over the other.
"He'll never understand
It was not moonlight madness, dreams, or heat
Evolved that dark adventure in defeat.
They say, 'Revenge is sweet.'
Certes, it is! He made a bad beginning
With us, so soothly I have sent him spinning
This night the circuit of an old chart of birth
Portioned to rascals—showing Heaven and Earth—!"

The Voice died out again, quite silver-toned.
Down in the gutter Great Leary stirred and groaned.

ALEXANDER, THE CRAP KING

Anyone dat hones
Fo' a tas'e uh Heaven,
A lil tas'e uh Heaven,
Watch me roll-a de bones,
(Come seben, come 'leben!)
Watch me roll-a de bones!

Guess I'se bad! Dat so?
Dat so, sho nuff?
Ah call you-all's bluff!
(Dat's de stuff, dat's de stuff!)
Lak a houn'-dawg take 'm,
Wharsoare de flea be,
Yo jes watch me break 'm!
Speak to muh, Phoebe!
Ee-yah-yah! An' *out* de back do'!
Eight, *dat's* mah p'int; ah sho' is po'!
Say, anyone dat hones
(Natchul fo'm, bones!)
Roll me jes a few,
(Yassuh, you too!)
Jine mah rebel
(Oo! Up jump de debbil!)
In a r'ally rollin',
In a riley rolling',
In a rolly-rollin'
De bo-ones!

ALEXANDER, THE CRAP KING

Down on de lebbee, sunset soon,
Co'n-pone en chick-en, en de risin' moon!
Heah de Yankees talk: *Noo* Yawk, *Noo* Yawk!
(Not a smile en de city all de miles yo' gotta walk,
No mo' possum, no mo' pones!)
All ah got is de bones,
All ah got is de bones,—
So ef anybody hones
Fo' ter roll me jes' er lil, ah kin mek 'm sick.
(Get his bill, Big Dick!)
Ya-as, wid deseyeah lil' stones
Ah kin skin 'm putty slick.
(On de *re*-boun', bones!)
Nine's mah p'int—ninety days de jedge gave 'm.
An' a fo'—*an'* a five—out de calaboose ter save 'm.
(Got de baabeh's itch, so de baabeh couldn' shave 'm!)
In a r'ally rollin' de bones.

Hebben's mah desiah, an' de Glohry street.
Youall'll heah de pattah ob de angels' feet,
Jes' like Hell done cotch afiah,—
Ya-as, an' you'll yell Whassamattah?
But befo' de sky-cops scattah
All de folks aroun' 'm
An' de cop commandah yell "Pinch 'm an' impoun' 'm!"
Why, you'll know it's *Alexandah,*
An' be glad you foun' 'm!
Ah'll be rollin' de bones,
Ah'll be rollin' de bones,
Ah'll be tossin' 'm de fus' time on de glohry stones.

(Six—it—stays!
Flock o' trays, flock o' trays!)
Ah'll be rollin' 'm fer hyahps an' fer deseyeah rings
Wot dey weahs roun' dey haid, deseyeah roreyoley things.
(Nebbah on de money—an' leben fus' time!)
De spots all knows me. *Dah goes yo' dime!*
Ya-ah, de luck'll nebbah lose me;
See de seben rayfuse me!
Come a runnin', Mistah Richud,—
Sho! It sutt'nly am a crime
When ah's r'ally rollin', when ah's riley-rollin', when ah's rolly-rollin'
De bo-ones!

Lashins er graby, an' a chick-en j'int,—
But lil', lil' Phoebe's mah faveright p'int!
Nebbah had a wife,
Lazy all mah life,
Ah kin play de fiddle, ah kin play de fife,
Ah kin jump Jim Crow, ah kin shuck an' hoe,—
Knows all de conjuhs wot de voodoos know,—
But mos'v all ah hones
To be rollin' de bones,—
To be r'ally rollin'
(Whassat? Ah's bleedge ter stop?)
To be riley rollin'
(Matchyuh, Mistah Cop!)
To be roley-oley-oley-oley-oley-oley-olin',
To be rolly-rollin' de bones. . .
Dah's *so!*

THE SEVENTH PAWN

1809

"This summer day is well-nigh over!"
Grated the corncrake in the clover.
And the messenger's mare, whose neck nid-nodded,
On the hot white road half-drowsing plodded.
"Oh for a vintner's bush and sign,
A long churchwarden, a stoup of wine!"
Mused the man who blinked through dusty lashes,
With dust on his beard and his brown mustaches,
Dust on his hat with its Quaker cock,
Dust on his neckcloth, an ill-creased stock,
Dust from his cloak to his boots, white dust
Coating him quite, like a cake's thin crust.

He had made haste, a haste unmanning,
On a mission of Mr. Canning's planning;
And the sloop awaited him, under Dover,
'Spite of Bonaparte to sneak him over
To Walcheren. *Ah, but that fragrant clover!*

Nodded the thistle and shimmered the corn,
And all was as still as a sabbath morn
At half-past four of that afternoon.
Deep-tranced hedge-birds essayed no tune.
"Oh for an alehouse!" he quavered. "Soon!"

And an alehouse rose, as they sometimes will,
Over the brow of a little hill,
Where a chequer-board hung with device well-drawn
Asserting "The Sign of the Seventh Pawn."
A whimsical sign, and that is flat,—
But all signs are queer, for the matter of that.
So our man dismounted and knocked rat-tat
At the green half-door, and he doffed his hat
To a crisp little wisp of a curtseying dame
Who bade him enter; so in he came!

I wonder if you have ever seen
Flaxman's chessmen; the king, the queen,
The knight, the bishop, and all the rest
Carved so quaintly, so quaintly dressed?
What called them to mind was that alehouse room
With its settles and pewter and rose-leaf gloom
And its deep-carved tables. It doesn't matter
If you don't play chess—but all of the latter
Were with chessmen set like the hosts of Aurelian,
Chessmen of red and of white carnelian,
Chessmen of ivory, ebony,
And shining boxwood—a sight to see!
For every piece, whether pawn or rook,
Was carved so it could not be mistook,
Fashioned in character, almost breathing,
'Neath the herb-hung rafters, where blue smoke wreathing
Told of a pipe smoked not far distant;
And then, to the little dame's chirp insistent,

Came bowing out from behind the bar
The strangest "Mine Host" found near or far.

His peas-cod bellied doublet seemed
Of a satin some draper must have dreamed.
His peach-colored stockings and stuffed trunk-hose
Deeply slashed and embroidered with pearls in rows,
His Catanian nostril and proud though still lip
Took one back to the time of weak King Philip
Or thereabout in Iberian history.
His bronze-carved profile increased the mystery!
Tobacco he smoked, and between each puff
Of his long churchwarden the man took snuff
From a silver snuff-box enchased with griffins
That grimaced oddly to ape his sniffin's.
(Perhaps that was purely imagination;
But our hero saw it with perturbation!)

Soon enough, over wine of a golden color
To thrill even reformers whose sense is duller,
In such weighty matters, than dull gray lead,—
When cooled with this draught, and divinely fed
On a cream-tart of strawberries richly red,—
This mysterious host to the messenger said
In English quite pat but inflected drolly,
"You must play me a game, by all that's holy!"
(Invoking the spirit of Dacciesole
Who, as you know, a Dominican friar,
Wrote us first on chess—or call Caxton liar!)
"'Tis the game of all games that quaintest is,

By the boudoir of Queen Semiramis!
Quaintest and chastest, and played they say
By Louis le Gros, and by Rabelais
When he delved in Galen at Montpellier;
Played in court and in camp by Charlemagne,
Saladin, Bajazet, and Tamburlaine,
An imperial motley how rich and rare!
Wife, set us a board!" And the board was there.
Pieces were chosen with special care.
And the upshot was that the two began
The mightiest game yet known to man.

The messenger, studying knight and king,
Could not but marvel at such a thing,
How each was carved in such human guise
That you almost expected them—small surprise!—
To shrug their shoulders or roll their eyes.
The mitred bishops with croziers borne,
The knights with mace upon saddle-horn,
The queens with tiaras and netted hair,
The castles with ramparts and winding stair!

Then he offered a pawn. His hope waxed stronger
Soon—and the candle-snuffs waxed longer;
And outside the alehouse his white mare dreamed
By the close-cropped grass, while a pale moon gleamed.
For sunset came and went like flame.
Night closed in on the silent game;
And the hostess hied her to bedside prayers
Leaving glimmering tapers to light the players.

A struggle; and then the Spaniard won.
"But allow me to show you how it is done!
Here is, for an instance, the Devil's Counter!"
He cried, "The Queen's worth the whole amount. Her
Move is a lion disguised as a lamb. It
Is plotted by Queen's Pawn Counter-Gambit;
But first—Pawn to King's Fourth!" He moved the
piece,
And weirdly—would wonders never cease!—
In five more moves, we need not state,
Achieved another swift check-mate.

Then back he leaned, and his pointed beard
Lifted aloft as he kindly leered.
The nonplussed messenger scratched his head.
"You are a foreigner, sir," he said.
"Long have I loved the ranks and files
And have sometimes pondered this game for miles
On my travels—but never, o'er wine and victual,
Have I seen so much,—aye, and learned so little.
Why you have chosen to masquerade
In clothes of an antique cut and shade,—
Your quaintness too easily mistook
For a figure stepped from a story-book
Whose colored pictures thrill happy children,—
I don't understand. It is all bewild'ring.
And I have passed on this road before
Never perceiving this alehouse door.
And, by all the gods, I freely confess
I have never seen such a game of chess!

Where did you learn it? Near or far, you
Could best them all. Why, good Lord, who are you?
Rare old Ruy Lopez himself would gasp
At your 'Devil's Gambit'! Your hand to clasp!"

The Spaniard extended thin sinewy fingers,
And about his lips such a smile as lingers
On the summer sea when it swoons with dawn
Played for a moment. "Dear sir, a pawn
Of fortune," he murmured, "The Seventh Pawn!"

"Eh?" said the other. "Such mystery blinks
Under the eyelids of the Sphinx,
And far more befitting there to awe
The pilgrim who stands on her great stone paw—
But from Oedipus, with all due apology,
I cannot reckon my genealogy.
Pray explain your allusion!" The Spaniard, "Why,
Since you press me so closely, I shall try!
Chess is a life-game, life a chess-game,
A strategic duello, a plan-and-guess game.
Are we but pawns? Or with every move
Betray we the knight's or the bishop's groove?
As for applications—the bishops there
Never leaving the color of their square—
They might symbolize Faith, how religion strives
Straight on, crossed by currents of all our lives.
Do you see what I drive at? Simply at first
I revolved such thoughts, and then there burst
A light on me, in my youth, at last.

Why, this chess is rooted as far in the past
As Egypt. Greeks, Romans, Hindoos, Chinese,
Have played their variants, if you please;
And the game takes hold of the roots of wars,—
Yes, leaps thence to the secrets of the stars,
And thence . . my young eyes bulged from my head
In Salamanca when first I read
A seer's words that lightened its penetralia!
Your humor rises? Your doubts assail you?
Yet I tell you truly it is the key
To the chart of God, to the mystery
Of Heaven and Hell! Its every plan
Explains a purpose and use of man.
And sudden the whole articulate scheme
Blazed through my brain!"
In dizzy dream
The other stared, while the Spaniard wove
A web of words his listener strove
But feebly to break. It caught in mesh
Every riddle of spirit and flesh,
Wandered, meandered, and interwound
Through metaphysics, o'erleaped the bound
Of philosophy, transcended symbol,
Yet regained the clue—lost worse than a thimble
In the proverbial haystack—swept
Through mysteries like some fiend adept,
Hung on a metaphor, leaped the abysm
And galloped off on a syllogism,
Returned on the wings of an epigram,
And grew in mad skill till star-swarms swam

Through the messenger's bewildered wit
As he gaped and goggled opposite.

"Know more," his swarthy host continued,
Grasping his wrist in a clutch steel-sinewed.
"Little elixir have I needed
With Albertus Magnus, to find what he did,
Nor Trismosius' Magisterium
To a longer life! I have struck them dumb,
All the alchemists and the spells they cast,
All the spirits that hover about the Vast.
For my knowledge quickly enabled me
To cheat Hell, with Heaven, eternally!"
And the other stared on as the Spaniard cried,
"Yes, I live, I live—I have never died!

"Your day is appointed—and mine—but I
Saw too many moves ahead to die.
Every beat of the pulse, every tick of the clock
Is a move—but intelligent keys unlock
The solution. And I have discerned the whole!
Does God's hand set forth for bliss or dole
One more piece? Does the Devil's black claw show
As he marshals another in his row?
'Twixt both I have played the game as taught,
Sudden as lightning, and swift as thought,—
But now . . !" (And the lisping voice so near
Sank so wearily, almost a tear
Seemed to stand and gleam in the darkening eye!)
"But now—*ah, they will not let me die!*"

The room was quite still for a gasping-space,
And the other gazed into a haggard face.

"They will not . . for once I became aware,
I created a country in the air.
My imagination took with a surge
The potencies of a demiurge
From that Perfect Knowledge . . and yet, the power
To bring me sweet death at any hour
Lies in the hands of the phantom queen
Of that region no mortal man has seen.
That is the loophole the Powers have left me
Before their subtle revenge bereft me
So suddenly of all my pride.
But—they knew, they knew I should be denied!
For the queen I breathed into ghostly being,
Why, hers is almost marvelous seeing,
And she knows her realm, with my death, would be
Naught—thinnest air—lost utterly,
To the last pawn!
I plead and plead
When I visit there, and my earth-days bleed
Unheeded down before her crown.
Ah God, my relentless years would drown
A stone in tears! You—you marked my dress,
Then, how old do you think me? Come, confess!"

The blue smoke eddied, and through it swam
That wax-pale face.
"Dear Sir, I am,"

The Spaniard grinned, with dry lips curled back,
"A miracle, fleshly and cardiac!"

That gleam of teeth such as a she-wolf suckles
Made the other grip with whitened knuckles
An edge of the heavy-carven table.
He could only stammer, with brain unstable,
"Ha, ha! That's good—good enough—dare swear!
Excellent, excellent!"
"Have a care!"
And across the hidalgo's face a flare
Of sudden malice like green flame blew.
"Fool!" said the Iberian. "I'll prove it you!"
Like a lean black cat with a rapier tail
He lounged to the fire; then flicked forth a veil
Of spangled iridescent stuff,
Full ten yards long, from beneath his ruff;
Span it in his hands to a whirling maze
Of fabric flying in rainbow blaze;
And—"There!" he cried, as he let it fall
On the licking flames, "goes Bathsheba's shawl!"
"And here," he cried, as he drew from his leg
A crystalline globe, "is a real Roc's egg!"
Over his shoulder he tossed it lightly.
Crackle-smash it fell. The fire so brightly
Blazed on the instant, the other's eyes
Went almost blind with his shocked surprise,
But it seemed that one moment he saw arise
From a golden core of streaming light
A vast grotesque bird, with infinite

Spread of wing and a great hooked beak.
"So! So!" cried the Spaniard, and turned, to tweak
From thin air a flask with a ruby glow,
"Now I pour the elixir of life—and—so!"
Suddenly next to his very feet
That other felt the floor rock and beat,
Burst up like kindling, and reveal
A proud-horsed knight, from head to heel
One portentous dazzle of brilliant steel.
This was white magic to behold.
The charger tossed his crest of gold,
'Neath purple and crimson caparison,
Pawed, and his rider sate thereon
With beaked visor pushed above his eyes
Revealing a ruddy face and wise,
Thick brown-bearded. Then sudden he
Opened his lips, and thunderously
Roared, "Caïssa!" and shook his lance,
Its rippling pennon with gold a glance;
And then in a great voice deep and strong
Shook the rafters with this wild song:

"I am Sir Lionel Perceforest,
Uthyr Pendragon's bastard son.
A wyvern azure is my crest.
I win all kingdoms that are won.
I leap to battle when crossbows hail
Their quarrels that rattle on coats of mail.
My broadsword whirls from East to West.
I spur amain with lance in rest.

Ho, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal!
My sword is mighty. It shall prevail!

"Say Theseus had a woman's wrist,
Call Alexander a fool foredone,
Dub Lord Æneas what things ye list,—
I win all kingdoms that are won!
I ride the forest in moonlight white.
Soul, that abhorrest the nets of night,
In thy adventure when woods are whist
I spur amain through leprous mist.
Ho, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal!
My sword is valiant. It shall prevail!

"Deep in the dragon darkness quail
Chimæras like Bellerophon's.
The starlight strikes each gleaming scale
To peacock colors and flashing bronze.
Through thickets I thrust to front the cave.
Beasts bite the dust before my glaive.
My sword is terrible to prevail.
Ho, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal, Sanc Greal!
Christ on the Rood and Mary Pale,
Hell for the Paynim, and hail the Grail!"

With that the chimney seemed to choke
And the room was filled with a waft of smoke
Cloudier and bluer than indeed
Had eddied ere this from Virginian weed.
Through its swirls the messenger half-perceived

Other clashing knights, cuirassed and greaved,
Mane and tail of other chargers bold
Interplaited with threads of gold,
And the glitter of spiked steel o'er all
From gleaming chanfrain and bright poictral.

How in Heaven's name could that small inn-room
Inclose such hordes as its guest saw loom
For a moment, to charge the chimney-breast
With pennon fluttering, lance in rest,
And leap with the shower of sparks they smote
Sudden-sucked up the draught of the chimney-throat?
What airy bugle thrilled wildly winding? . .
The floor was a furnace, the smoke was blinding!
With one arm flung over his smarting eyes
The reeling messenger tried to rise.
Then a strong arm steadied his deadly fear.
The Spaniard's voice was in his ear:
"Leap!" And he leapt through shrivelling flame
To a void of darkness, lost breath, and came
To his senses again and opened his eyes
On a tempest of stars and tossing skies
Through which he bored with a rocket's flight
While planets poured past to the pit of night.
Upward—upward! He cried aghast
As the deeps of heaven bombarded past.
Upward—upward—and still he knew
By his side that the Spaniard was flying too.
His lids squeezed tight, as he whirled and hurdled
And somersaulted. His blanched blood curdled.

One last fearful hurl, when his doom seemed sealed,
And head-foremost he slid through a soft green field!

Harsh as a file his first breath rasped back,
Each limb felt as limp as an empty sack.
His head was a tight-stretched resonant drum.
And then that same merciless voice said "Come!"—
And, with throat tight-gagged in hammering fright,
He opened his eyes on—life and light!

Who shall describe those thick-flowered meads
Where knights curvetted on their prancing steeds,
Where silken damask pavilions lay
Crowned with their arms and ribboned gay?
Heralds in vivid coats were seen
Strutting proudly across the green;
Squires with cushioned helms or glaives
And men-at-arms with fair white staves.
All blazed and bustled as if the intent
Were this day for a royal tournament.
Pages ran, great chargers reared to ramp.
One bee-hive hum filled the whole great camp.
And inexorably before our friend
Whisked in such strange wise through the whole world's
end
To this chivalric and antic heaven,
The Spaniard stood. The numeral Seven
Blazed from front and back of a tabard sheathing
His peacock pride! The messenger's breathing
Came slower and softer. A grinning serf

Beckoned them over the soft rich turf.
They followed.
As the tents drew near
The bright sun glittered on many a spear.
One squire in a silver basin splashed
And through dripping beard laughed unabashed.
Down the tent-lane tramped with a great to-do
Two kettle-drummers in crimson and blue.
And a pompous herald met the beholders,
A parchment fluttering from his shoulders
On which, inscribed in black-letter script
With capitals flaming from quills well-dipped
In crimson, a speech ran on this wise:

"Hear ye, hear ye what doth devise
Our sovereign, supreme, and glorious queen
Caïssa Celestia! Be it seen
That all her subjects throng to her banner
From every place and in every manner
Since the cruel Chinese potentate
Chaturanga is at our gate
With ships and elephants roundly cursed
By our brave Scaccophilus the First,
King of Arch-chequerboard—orchard and vine,
Valley and mountain, thy land and mine!
Hear ye, hear ye! For our fair queen
Let us chase and deliver our strokes with dene
For today, as our annual tournament
Was blithely preparing in many a tent,
Came couriers breathless and faint with fear

Who cried, 'The Mongolian host draws near
Mixed with the Persians,—on gilded gongs
Clanging and banging, in silk-robed throngs
And armor of steel and bronze and gold,
A terrible army to behold!' . .
Japan's small fighters in masks agrin
And horned headdresses redouble the din
With short and long swords clashing and rattling,
Bows and arrows tossed, horse and foot embattling
In lacquer that envy of every bonze stirs
Pictured with dragons and birds and monsters;
And their daimyos' litters with jewels aglitter—
Four milk-white mules to every litter
With head-harness ringing a thousand bells
And housings scarlet and gold, or else
Purple and silver, direct the throng!
White and grey elephants shamble along
With great painted howdahs wherein Fong-lee,
Yoo-fow, and such princes of high degree
Ply their chop-sticks and drink their tea
While almond-eyed girls touch the tinkling lute
And the bright hues blaze from each silken suit
And the coiled black queues entangle the sky,
And each squatting celestial is fain to ply
Bright curious fans, such as wizards chase,
Their ivory sticks carved fine as lace,
Their rich silk spread embroidered with
Wonderful legend and marvelous myth!
So with shoguns, mikados, and tramping battalions;
Elephants, camels, and zebra-stallions,

With match-lock and pole-axe, o'er mountain and valley
Chaturanga approaches! . . Ho, knights, to the rally!
Rally, rally! Forth we must sally
To meet the foe in yon chequered valley
Whereon we have ever stood, and smitten,
And won for Caïssa—as it is written!"

The herald stood striking an attitude
Till the messenger read the last word.
Ensued
More sights of the camp. Before one tent
A huge smith over a bellows bent,
Fanning a forge. His big broad back
Was turned, but his habit showed a black
Numeral Two.
They stood apart,
The Spaniard explaining, "You see, his art
Is fashioning saddle, bridle, and spur
For his knight. And does it not yet occur
To you that these numbers denominate us
Our Queen's eight pawns? To leap the hiatus
Back to plain life, 'tis in Chaucer you'll find
The supposed resemblance of every kind
Of piece to the mortal whom it suits.
So all of us have our attributes.
I am the Courier. *And today,*
If a last hope fail me, I'll try a way . . !"
He recovered his smile. "But come, confess
How like you my phantast's Land of Chess?"

Then, waiting no answer, with quicker pace
He led round a pavilion. The other's face
Worked with dumb questions. But when they stopped
Once clear of the camp, his jaw down-dropped,
For into his eyes swam the larger view.
Mountains ringed them, mountains of blue,
Or were they mountains or moving cloud?
However, beneath them stretched a proud
Sweep of river and plain, like a dazzling shield;
Aye, beneath them indeed! For here the field
Dropped sheer from a rock-ridge, a rock-ridge crowned
With a castle whose ramparts might well astound.
A wide fosse lay deep round its plainward plan
Over which a great chained drawbridge ran.
It crouched upon the beetling crag
Turreted high like an antlered stag.
Its keep rose clear, its outer wall
Beyond the base-court began the fall
Of the cliff face. It inclosed enisled
Magnificent castellations, piled
With turrets (O pledge of knightly farings!)
Emblazoned with rich armorial bearings.
Within rose din. Above flew forth
Long twining pennants to west and north.
They crossed the bridge. They climbed the deep
Steep steps within the round-tower keep,
Entered a doorway whose great arch shone
With a horse-head carved on its transom-stone,
And—were led to the stair by the Seneschal.

Right through the thickness of the wall
That dark stair rose, ignoring doors
With glimpses of the different floors—
Ladies with framed embroidery,
Curled pages bending silken knee,
Great stone chimneys, oak panellings,
Dark tall portraits of queens and kings.

They came to the summit of the tower.

A sight to sap an Emperor's power
With majesty! Tree over tree
The forest clomb under them thunderously
To lap at the base of their barbican,
Whence, winding down, a great causey ran
Lost in the wood below. But—strange!—
The mapped fields beneath took on a change.
As far they spread their pattern appeared
A giant chequer-board, spaced and cleared,
From wood to mountain (or cloud) that far
On the horizon . . *showed glints of war*
Even now approaching! Yes! For the tall
Eighth Pawn—who else but the Seneschal!—
Now pointed and shook his keys at the foe.
"That is his army moving below,—
Chaturanga's Mongolian evil,
Friends of the fiends and spawn of the Devil!
Look you, they hold nine files instead
Of eight—and how are their pieces spread?
Along lines, not squares,—and placed for guile

At the intersections of rank and file!
Bah! And they keep an open space
Between fifth and sixth ranks from either base;
The River, they call it! . . Yet they may
Bid their Cannon thunder their worst today
And their Councillors plot, for—by my Ferse!—
This rabble of idolaters,
Dogs of unbelievers, paynims confessed,
Shall by our Caïssa be clean outchessed!"

Such spleen mazed the messenger. Down they ran
And across a courtyard. The puzzled man
Groped in the words of that stern official
Still wondering what was so prejudicial
In the foe that came—only catching glints
Of all these matters, and sidewise hints.

And now, in the great main hall and court,
What bustle there was! Of every sort
Was the armor that clanked and clattered and blazed.
Lance and sword of the horsemen grazed
Poleaxe and estoc of footmen fleet
Cap-a-pie from heads to feet.
Some with pavises, some with targes,
Some with morning-stars (whose stroke enlarges
The range of brains),—with morion
Cuirasse, heaume, and habergeon,
Pike, spontoon, bascinet, and partizan,
(That one for sport hurled over a bartizan)
Halbert, gisarm, every manner

Of metal that ever danced to a banner
Or fabric that ever upholstered metal
Or leather or wood—in splendid fettle
The men-at-arms milled in the great stone hall
Before a daïs, imposing on all
Reverence perforce. The stranger knew
There stood Caïssa the Queen on view,
And then he saw. She shone full-stoled
With ermine, gowned in cloth of gold.
One instant he had to visualize her
Through the throng. The Bishop, her adviser,
Though more like a judge of many pleas
With a great tome open upon his knees,
Sat at her right—on her left another
Legal potentate, this Bishop's brother.
"One reads criminal, one the civil law!"
The Spaniard whispered. The traveller saw
Next, as the throng a little shifted,
Headdresses passed, and nearer he drifted,—
He saw the King. But the dark Queen kept her
Hawk eyes fixed on his golden sceptre.
And, in purple robes, he shook as with cold.
The golden apple twitched in the hold
Of his trembling fingers. Before his face
Stood to defend him with sword and mace,
In helm and hauberk, two knights of the throne,
One the proud Queen's and one his own.
And now, through the crowd, to a murmur of "Look,
Hither they move! Yes, yon's a Rook."
Two figures advanced as legates should,

With staff and mantle and minever hood,
And passed in close converse. A glimpse of the throne
Again, and our friend saw the Queen alone
But the Spaniard approaching. He plead. She said:
(The messenger caught the words) "What? Dead?
Why, if dead . . ! No, no! For the last time, No!
Who created Us? Fool! We shall keep it so!"
Off his host rushed cursing.
And then, afar,
Some trumpet blew shrill points of war;
And out to the courtyard, out to the causey
All swept. Without a single pause he—
The messenger—ran, great bound on bound,
While horse-hoofs struck sparks from all around
In deafening din; and other racing
Men-at-arms and maids made such a chasing
With varlets and Pawns (for such they must be)
Naught could, because of the haste and the dust, be
Well discerned,—but only neighing
And puffing and shouting and jolting and swaying
And hurling and laughing and clashing and praying.

He ran in the mob, and could not fall
Since the speed and the weight of the mass held all
Closely erect; he ran until
All life seemed an avalanche down a hill
With banners tossing and trumpets tooting,—
And then—in the flick of an eye—went shooting
Through trees that darkly and vaguely reared
Out on the plain, where a space was cleared.

All scattered and swarmed toward different places.
He followed the crowd and watched their faces.
Where was the Spaniard? But, to a cry
"The Army!", eight marching Pawns came by,
Upon their flag a device you guess:
"We are the very soul of Chess!"
There was the smith they had seen ere this,
And Number One, who a woodsman is
With hatchet in girdle; and close in tread,
With a great quill pen upraised instead
Of a lance, came Number Three, the Clerk,
With inkhorn swung and damp hair dark.
Four? Four shook a pair of scales; for shield he
Wagged before him a large unwieldy
Bolt of cloth—a Merchant verily!
And Five, with a razor trod right merrily—
Spicer, apothecary, surgeon.
And then, as solemn as a sturgeon
Stepped Six, the Taverner, tankard-jangling;
And last, the Spaniard, strangely wrangling
Now with the Seneschal. In one hand
The former bore a packet planned
For courier-delivery.
The Seneschal wielded a big brass key.
They marched, and the crowd spread back and back
As the two Throne-knights rode on their track.
The Legates and the Bishops passed
Amid acclamations; and so, at last,
The proud stout Queen and the small pale King.

But soon all saw a daunting thing,
As the small chess-host of Caïssa spread
Over the plain,—for forms of dread
Had drawn right near in the interim
And the whole horizon was splendid and dim
With tossing howdahs and swaying hills
And whanging music with shrills and trills
Shot through,—and grotesque hordes in mail,
And beasts one lollop from head to tail!
Suddenly out of that swarm there streamed
Red rockets which burst into stars that gleamed
In rainbow colors, and wept toward earth;
And a fusillade of firecrackers rattled into birth.
Gongs swung wildly. Lo and behold,
From the first fierce ranks this war-song rolled:

Aie! Aie! Aie! . .
A proud and purple King
Reigned in India the olden.
To the seal upon his ring
His subjects were beholden;
And there came to pass a thing
That in words of blood is told in
The tomes of the Yellow Nations.
Their salvations thus we sing!

Wise Kajah and Brahmin
Descried him bloat with power
And sought to bring him calm in
An anguished evil hour.

They came with prayer and psalm in
To the throne-room of his tower.
"Thy people all are dying!"
They came crying to the King.

Aie! Aie! Aie!
"Thou hast forgot thy land,
All that its peace and war meant;
Thou rend'st it in each hand
As one might rend a garment.
Thou rul'st with wild command!"
And he said, "Die, dogs, in torment!"
And had them all beheaded
Did that dreaded evil King.

But Sissa, Daher's son,
Who saw his land so broken,
Hissed low, "The King dreams on;
Yet shall his sleep be woken!"
To the Silence hath he gone
To brood,—saith, "I have spoken!"
What snare is he inventing
For that unrelenting King?

Aie! Aie! Aie! . .
The princes tributary
Saw his people's love divided.
In secret woxe they merry
And their hour of power they bided,
For they saw a kingly quarry

And the bloody wrong his pride did
To the souls of a people stricken
Who must sicken of their King.

Then Brahmin Sissa's thought
Evolved a Game of Glory
And soon the folk were taught
Its rules and skill and story,
And the Brahmin soon was brought
Before that tyrant gory
Who growled, "Strange rumors reach me.
Thou shalt teach me of this thing!"

Aie! Aie! Aie!
They played most secretly.
And Sissa, to astound him,
Showed the King in Chess to be
The sport of foes that bound him—
Stripped of might and empery
Did his folk not rally round him.
"For his strength is in his people.
Ponder deep all this, oh King!

"Alone this King is naught
But a spoil for ravenous foemen.
And Love—can Love be bought
With the sword? Nay! Love must show men
Warm true heart and word and thought!" . .
And he understood the omen;
His heart was moved; his nation
Gained salvation through their King!

It ululated like weird shrill mirth
Of hidden meaning. It sang the birth
Of Chess from the East . . a thing to appal
Those of the faith of the Seneschal,
Who roared at once, "High blasphemy!
Thracian Caïssa, this is She
The Bright Undying, beloved of Mars,
Whose strength victorious sways our stars!
He from Love's brother, Euphron, sought
The First Chess Board,—by Euphron's thought
Designed, and for Caïssa's kiss.
Dastard recalcitrants, this is
The Faith we hold, our hope of Bliss!
Ye unbelieving dogs, we fight
For our Caïssa, Truth, and Right!
Degenerate Sissains, 'ware of us
Who rend your ranks idolatrous!"

Crowds tossed about the messenger,
And scarcely he could see or stir
Till a squire lent him stirrup and hand.
Then, over their heads he gazed, and scanned
A space of the endless chequered plain
Cleared, and enclosed by the gorgeous train
Of Chaturanga, across the sward,—
And here, by Caïssa's clamorous horde.
But of all the knights who had taken shield
Only two stood forth. The squire revealed
The reason, explaining genially
This first conventional tilt to be,

As one might say, a formality,
A try-out for the coming war
In which, when arrayed, an army-corps
Should be reckoned one piece, squadrons of horse
Wheel for one knight, and a serried force
Of footmen, spears, and bows march on
To represent a single pawn.
Meanwhile (though in earnest) there preluded
This fight of Thirty-two. But if feud did
Ever engage more desperate souls,
It is not written on Heaven's rolls.
And there on Chaturanga's side
Stood Cannon and Elephants of pride
And Councillors all ranged arow
In the nomenclature the East doth know.
And suddenly out between the forces
Ambled two envoys on armored horses
From either side. After swift debating
They each read out (strictly translating)
The governing laws of the combat, clause
And codicil, to the end. A pause.
First Move became Caïssa's right.
Chaturanga answered. A bright Throne-knight
Trotted out to a turfy plat, averred
By the crowd to be King's Bishop's Third. . .

But the messenger wearied. He wished to stroll
Through the throng. And he happened upon a scroll
Outrolled on a table, whereover sat
The Master Manœuvrer, wise and fat.

'Twixt him and the field ran pages gay
As he scribbled instructions for each new play.
And ever he fumed in tart vexation
As he reconnoitred the situation.
His wild gaze showed that he rolled his eyes on
Strategic and tactical horizon,
Attack and support, topographic key,
And points of impenetrability.
With muttering mumble and growls and groans
He burbled of hypothetic zones,
And gabbled a jargon worse than a mystic's
Freighted with Lesser and Greater Logistics.
(Doubtless his Oriental fellow
Served Chaturanga.)
But what a bellow
Of rage and hate assaulted the skies
Suddenly! It appeared from their cries
On a left oblique that a certain Pawn
Through the enemy's host had deftly gone
And, winning the farthest rank, was made
A Councillor. But here he betrayed
In a moment all hopes. He was acting queerly,
And rushed at his own Throne-knight, who nearly
Succumbed to his stroke. Yes! It seemed quite clear
That he was a traitor, or very near
Running amok!
And then a figure
Bobbed out on the field in a crazy jig,—your
Chinese director of movements and tacticals!
Bright on his nose danced his big horn spectacles.

But his claw fingers waved on high, to the gapers,
What—lo and behold!—but *The Secret Papers!*

"Then it *was* the Courier!" a great gasp rose.
And now, no mistake, he led their foes
In a Councillor's robes of flapping blue
And a crescent sword, and an uncoiled queue.
His identity—but of course you've guessed it.
'Twas the Seventh Pawn who, unarrested,
Overrode the ranks that reeled in confusion,—
'Twas the Spaniard's face, to their disillusion
That gleamed such a wild-cat grin! And behind
Flashed acres of swords. With a sudden blind
Burst of thunder crashed drum on drum.
Heavily the elephants lumbered up to come.
Yes, at double-quick, far-aligned battalions,
Dromedaries, leopards, and zebra-stallions,
Lacquered Samurai, yellow Asiatics,
Black-bearded Persians, Indian fanatics
Poured in hordes through the shattered chess game,
With lightning speed beyond all guess came
Bearing down on Caïssa's vassals
Whose great mass shuddered, gabbled "The Castle's
Round-tower—make for the Tower!" and madly
Turned to run. *They were frightened badly!*

Like a leaf on a wave was the messenger whirled,
And again commotion swallowed his world.
But in one last glimpse he beheld the queues
Of the jewelled celestials, like coiled lassos,

Spinning out and settling all around
Over neck of knight and knave homebound.
And above the rout wound a high weird cry:
"Still I live, I live! Can I never die?"

A dark veil dropped. Rain began to pour.
Struggling, wrenched, he was tossed once more
Shoulder-high. Turning his head half back
He saw all the heavens bulging black
With thunder. Asunder one jagged flash
On that instant ripped them. Then, with a crash
Of stunning violence, down shot
A huge vast hand, like a mighty blot
On the plain. It closed, immense, completely
Over the Spaniard—just as he sweetly
Swung his scimetar at the messenger's head!

* * * * * * * *

Why, what rubbish! There was the moon instead
With a thousand silver rays to shed
From that rich blue sky so thick with stars.

A thin hand crept where the beard was sparse
And rubbed a thin cheek. And the messenger rose
Reeling.

Where was he? Do you suppose
That Adept had died then? But *all* was dream!
Well, where—by the powers we all blaspheme—
Was the Inn? Or was there no Inn, forsooth!
There was not. Near by, like the jagged tooth
Of some dark old crone, the black field thrust forth

A milestone. The white road wound from the north
And west.
And then he heard a whicker
Beyond it, and caught the ghostly flicker
Of his white mare.
When he came that cropper
Or slid down in sleep, with none to stop her
She had strayed quite a bit.
But he must ride,
Or that waiting sloop would miss the tide!
With a sinking heart he remembered his mission.
Dreams! At this hour, with all perdition
Loose in the person of Bonaparte!
God, he must certainly mount and start!
Yet—he plunged in his pockets—his book? Where was . . ?
And then he perceived it on the grass,
Picked it up, all damp with the dew, and flipped
The fly-leaf open in the moonlight. Stripped
Of rhetoric, it read no less
Than thus, as follows:

"Studies in Chess;
Containing Caissa, a Scacchic Poem
By Sir William Jones."
(And, after that proem,)
"Pilidor's Parties—New Combinations—
Don Pedro Carrera's Situations;
With Other Matter condensed and sprightly
For Wits desiring to play Chess rightly."

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